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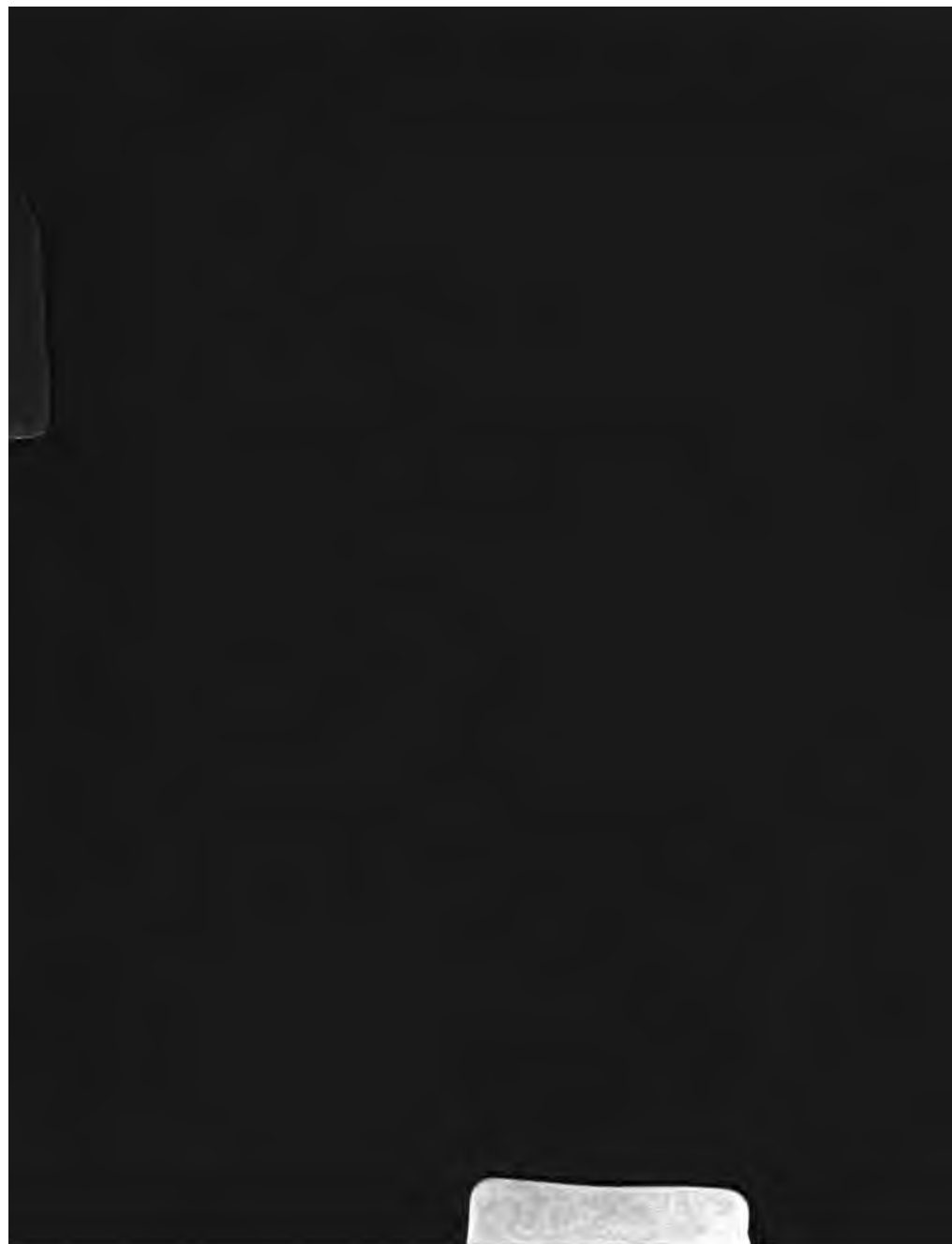
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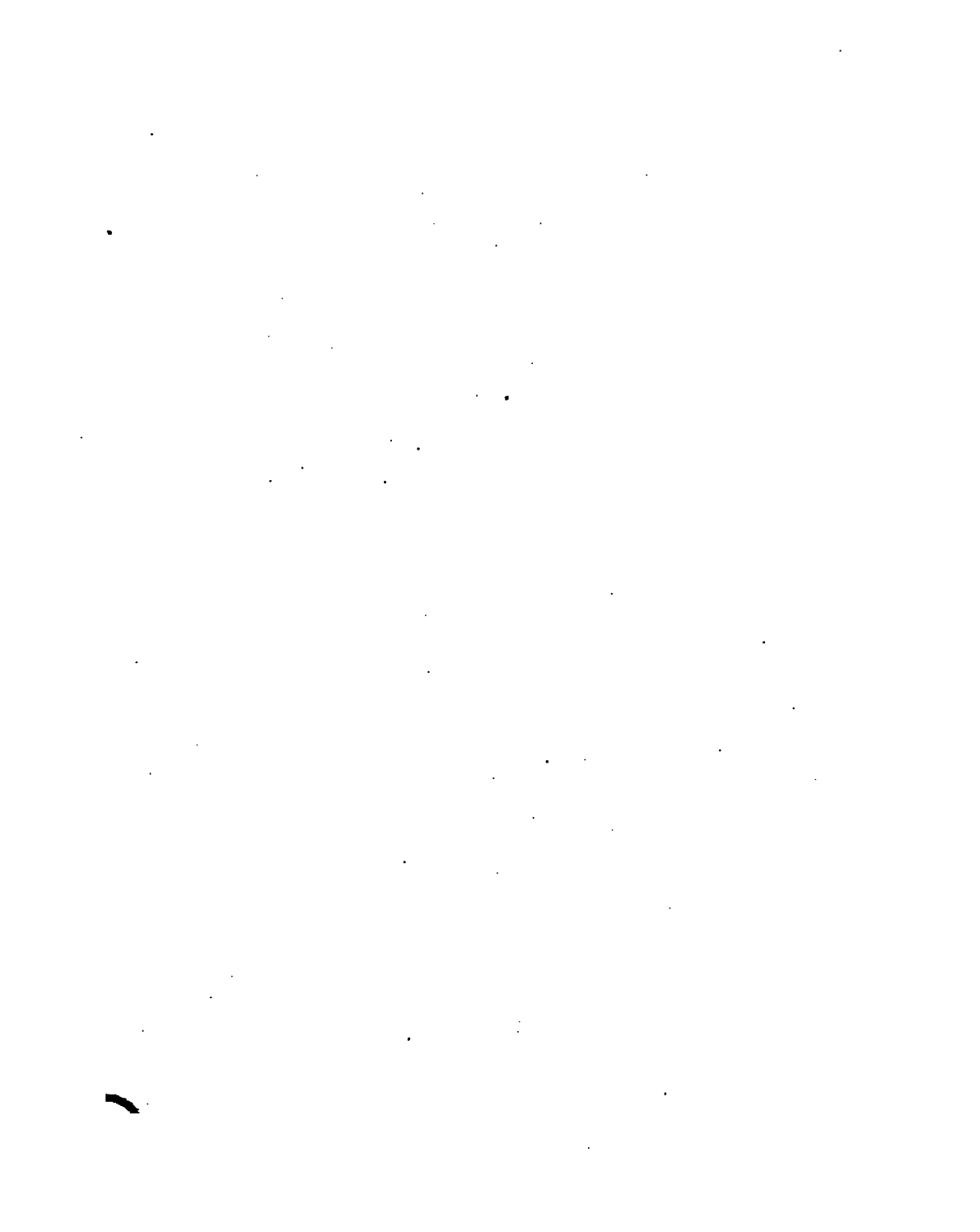
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SERMON SKETCHES
AND ESSAY.

BY THE







EIGHTY
SKETCHES OF SERMONS.

EIGHTY
SKETCHES OF SERMONS ;

TOGETHER WITH

AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

BY

FRANCIS CLOSE, D.D.,

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STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF

THE

REPUBLIC OF THE UNITED STATES

OF AMERICA



TO HIS GRACE

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE AND MOST REVEREND

JOHN BIRD SUMNER, D.D.,

LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY;

WHO

THROUGH A LONG AND EMINENTLY USEFUL LIFE

HAS SHOWN

A DEEP INTEREST IN THE IMPROVEMENT AND WELFARE

OF THE YOUNGER CLERGY,

THE FOLLOWING PAGES, ESPECIALLY DESIGNED FOR THEIR BENEFIT,

ARE,

WITH THE HIGHEST ESTEEM AND RESPECT,

INSCRIBED AND DEDICATED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

ON THE

COMPOSITION OF A SERMON AND PULPIT INSTRUCTION.

WHEN we stood up in the presence of God, and of his Church, as candidates for the office of the Christian Priesthood, the following questions were put to us by the Bishop :—

“ Are you persuaded that the Holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined, out of the said Scriptures, to instruct the people committed to your charge, and to teach nothing, as required of necessity to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by Holy Scripture? ”

“ Will you be diligent in prayers, and in reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and of the flesh? ”

And upon the faith of our affirmative answer to these questions, the Bishop not only prayed for us, with the laying on of hands, that we might be “ faithful dispensers of the Word of God,” but, as we knelt before him, he delivered to every one of us THE BIBLE, saying, “ Take thou authority to preach the WORD OF GOD,” &c.

Such is the solemn character with which the Church invests the Divine ordinance of PREACHING !

In this she is fully borne out by Holy Scripture itself. Even Christ was ordained to preach : “ The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor.” (Luke

iv. 18.) And He went forth and preached everywhere. To this He ordained his disciples, bidding them "preach the Gospel to every creature." And, after they received the Holy Ghost, they did so; and the book of the Acts of the Apostles is but a history of their preaching and the subject of it,—“They taught and preached Jesus Christ.” When Philip went down to Samaria, he “preached Christ unto them;” and to the Eunuch, “Out of God’s word” (Isaiah liii.) “he preached unto him Jesus.” Such testimonies might be quoted without number. And in the apostolic writings the same prominence and importance is attributed to preaching, and the identity of its subject is maintained. Respecting himself, St. Paul affirms that Christ sent him, “not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel” (1 Cor. i. 17); and this, not “with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”

He affirms that when the world was lost in the mazes of its own supposed wisdom, “God was pleased by the foolishness,” or simplicity, “of preaching to save them that believe” (ver. 21); and he esteemed it his highest honour to “preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” (Eph. iii. 8.) “Woe unto me,” saith he again, “if I preach not the Gospel.” (1 Cor. ix. 16.)

His apostolic injunctions are to the same effect. Thus to Timothy, charging him before God, and in the immediate view of the judgment-seat of Christ, he said, “**PREACH THE WORD**” (2 Tim. iv. 2); and this, “in season and out of season.”

How confirmatory are these Scriptures (and many like passages might be quoted) of the judgment of the Church in this matter! How does the combined authority of **DIVINE REVELATION**, and of the Church, its depository and witness, establish the true nature and importance of **PREACHING**!

Seeing, then, that preaching is a Divine ordinance,—that men are called to it by the solemn offices of the Church, and prepared for it by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit; and seeing that the subject and substance of preaching is nothing less than the **WORD OF GOD**, it is impossible that we can think or speak of the mode and method in which this office is to be discharged, as we might speak of any art or science of

man's device. To discuss this subject with flippancy, or to treat "*pulpit oratory*," as it is often styled, as if it were merely the result of the secular training of the schools, is little less than profaneness. It is perfectly lawful to take advantage of all natural gifts,—to improve them by all the assistance which may be obtained even from ancient heathen masters of speech: natural defects may thus be remedied, and faults corrected; but, in endeavouring to guide the young and inexperienced pastor in the discharge of his holy functions as a Christian teacher, higher considerations must be continually kept in view, and the *holy idiosyncrasy* of his work must never for one moment be forgotten.

And what is that *idiosyncrasy*, or its distinctive and peculiar character,—that which manifestly runs like a golden thread through all the exhortations of the Church and of the Bible on the subject? It is this,—*that Revelation, the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, the sacred writings, the Word of God, are to be the sum and substance of all that the preacher is authorized to say to the people.* This book is the minister's "*BRIEF*," and he must not travel out of the "*RECORD*." He is not only to "instruct the people out of the said Scriptures," but "to teach nothing else as of necessity to salvation, but what he is persuaded may be concluded and proved therefrom."

Nor only so: he must not only preach or proclaim to the people that Word, and that Word only, but he must do so in the full confidence of *its Divine efficacy to save.* The measure of our apprehension of this great truth will be the measure of our moral and spiritual success. I say of our spiritual success, for without such a conviction, we may become clever preachers, admired orators, close reasoners, and may call forth the applause of men,—crowding our churches with flattering auditors; but we shall not be *EVANGELISTS*, nor shall we save souls. The very art and science of true preaching lies in this profound confidence in the Divine Word: it is the art "*of handling the Word of God*" (2 Cor. iv. 2); which must be done, not only honestly, as opposed to "deceitfully," but reverently, and in faith.

Here then, we arrive at our first practical injunction to the incipient Christian teacher,—"*Take thou this book:*" beware how "you handle

it." It is to teach you ; and out of it you are to teach others. You are to follow, not to lead it. Commit yourself to its guidance ; be not afraid ; it will not mislead you. Divest yourself as much as possible of systems of theology ; emancipate yourself from schools of divinity ; approach the Holy Scripture as a humble disciple, and believing it to be the very Word of God ; labour rightly to understand its meaning, and then unfold that meaning to the people. One of the most ancient examples of preaching on record in the sacred page just illustrates that which I would enforce,—“ So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and *gave the sense, and caused them*” (the men, and the women, and the children,) “ *to understand the reading.*” (Neh. viii. 8.) Any pastor who succeeds in doing this has so far accomplished his work in the matter of preaching.

Believing then, that it is the work of my ministerial life to make myself master of the contents of the sacred volume, and then to unfold those contents to the people for their instruction, guidance, edification, and comfort, our question is, How can this best be accomplished ?

And first, with respect to that set form of instruction, now stereotyped in our Church, called a **SERMON**,—a discourse on a given topic, subject, or text, professedly taken out of the Word of God,—many suggestions may be made.

THERE IS THE CHOICE OF A SUBJECT. No slight difficulty this to a beginner. Here lies before him this wonderful book, with all its ancient histories, its marvellous prophecies, its profound doctrines, its elaborate practical exhortations. What is he to select ? Where is he to begin ? The worst plan he can adopt is to think of a subject or topic on which he feels inclined to address the people, and then to turn over the leaves of the Bible until he can drop on some expression, verse, or story which he can accommodate to his purpose. I do not say that this may never be done with advantage, on particular occasions, and by an experienced teacher ; but if this be an ordinary habit, the result will be distorted views of Scripture ; texts dissevered from their context and true meaning ; and an accommodation of the Word of God to our preconceived ideas, instead of a subordination of our minds to the guidance of

that Word. As a general rule, the appointed services of the Church on her different Sundays and festivals, the lessons, the epistle and gospel, will for some years afford the preacher comprehensive, yet specific subjects for his selection ; at all events, they may guide his mind to the most suitable and profitable topics for consideration. For many years I adopted this plan, and found much pleasure and profit in following the indications of the mind of the Church in her appointed services ; sometimes discovering a uniform character of instruction, which gave a harmony of colouring to the day's work, whether it were penitential or eucharistic, hortative or consolatory. But there are difficulties still to be encountered, and dangers to be avoided, in the choice of the particular passage, verse, paragraph, or narrative which should form our text. A striking, pointed, or touching and affecting text is very well ; but it is easy to fall into eccentricity and affectation. For example : I should object to such a text as "This year thou shalt die." If the whole of the verse were given it would not be so objectionable. But we have no right to propound such a sentence to any one in particular, or to cast such a message indiscriminately among the people. The expression of David would be admissible, and equally effective,—“As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death ;” because, though this might have a special meaning in the mouth of the speaker, it is universally true. One has heard of sermons on single words, as heaven—hell—time—eternity, and so forth ; all in exceedingly bad taste, and calculated only to astonish the vulgar, while those of cultivated minds and sound judgment must be offended. If the canon we have laid down touching the authority of Holy Scripture in this case be a sound one, every text, announced as such, *should contain the entire sense and idea of its Divine Author* : otherwise, while by using the words of Scripture as our professed subject, theme, or topic, and announcing them as our text, we appear to take God's Word as our authority, we are, in fact, only using the words of Scripture as an isolated motto, subjoining our own original and unauthorized ideas. Every text should be honestly suggestive of our subject ; our subject should spring out of our text, not the text out of our subject.

In the selection of miscellaneous topics, it is not always easy to avoid the prevalent impressions and changes of our own minds; and thus we fall into monotony, or at least, into some particular class of doctrines and duties, and work round and round in a narrow circle, leaving many other subjects wholly untouched. It is therefore important for every preacher to keep an accurate record of the texts and subjects of which he has treated, and often to consult his journal, examining it by the Word of God and the teaching of his Church, in order to assure himself that he has delivered the whole counsel of God, and in that due proportion which he may discover in Scripture; "keeping nothing back," nor pressing his own peculiar views forward with undue prominence. There is a beautiful symmetry observable in Scripture in the proportions of truth; and we should endeavour to imitate it in our teaching.

In the selection of topics and portions of Scripture, respect should also be had to the character of the hearers, and their moral and spiritual condition. Though the truths we have to propound are uniform, and must all in succession be produced, yet there is a wise adaptation of them to be observed by the expositor of God's Word. It would be palpably absurd to denounce the follies of fashionable life to a rustic congregation, or to condemn, in bold or coarse language, gross vices to a people generally moral or highly cultivated. In this the honesty and faithfulness of the preacher may often be tested. I once listened to a teacher, on the whole a faithful one, for six weeks; and I heard almost every vice denounced except that of drunkenness, which was the monster sin of his small society, and one from which some of the office-bearers of his church were not wholly exempt.

The Word of God is so rich in narrative, in illustration, in history, and in diversified allusions to natural objects in the visible world, that a Christian scholar ought not to find it difficult to adapt his style of address to any people, cultivated or uncultivated. No secular orators are furnished with such rich materials for their pleadings as we are, who plead with men for God. Our difficulties arise, not from paucity of matter, but from the want of a larger and more familiar acquaintance with the Word of God.

ON THE GENERAL STRUCTURE AND CHARACTER OF A SERMON.

A subject being chosen, how is it to be treated? We are to prepare a sermon, not to write an essay upon it. The essay style is altogether unsuited for the pulpit; we must never forget in our composition that that which we write is not to be printed for perusal in the study, but is to be preached, proclaimed, heralded, delivered *vivd voce* to the people. It is manifest that paragraphs, sentences, arguments intended to be placed before the eye of the student would naturally assume a shape ill-adapted for utterance to a mixed congregation. And here lies the secret of so much dull, heavy, and lifeless preaching. The religious essay, carefully conceived, accurately written, and frequently corrected,—its style polished, classical, elaborate,—is just wholly unfit to be spoken in the church and to the people. Its very excellencies are its faults; the neat antithesis, the well-sustained argument, the ingeniously introduced parenthesis, the inverted and almost poetical structure of the sentences, in which the nominative case and the verb are often many lines apart, may be well adapted for the press or for the schools, but will serve only to leave a gaping crowd unedified, uninstructed, unawakened. We must never forget, when we are writing a sermon, that though *written*, it is to be *spoken*, not even *read* to the people. We are not writing a letter, nor a theme, nor a review, nor anything which is to be addressed to the eye, but a holy speech, a sacred oration, a spiritual discourse to be addressed to the ears of men—often of unlearned men, men unaccustomed to listen to sustained argument, and therefore needing “great plainness of speech.”

Hence our very diction should be carefully considered. Saxon words should always be selected in preference to those of Norman or classical derivation. This is a subject much insisted on in many of our training colleges for schoolmasters, and the clergy would do well to turn their attention to it. Short words and short sentences suit the unlearned and the young; and they will not be displeasing to the educated if they contain pithy and sententious matter. There is no need of roughness or vulgarity in order to make ourselves comprehensible to the uneducated;

such a style is offensive alike to all; but simplicity, a plain, natural, almost colloquial, though not a familiar style, always tells. The declamatory or parliamentary style is carefully to be avoided; the mode of speech most natural to each of us is that which will generally best convey our meaning and our impressions to a congregation.

Some think that the careful arrangement of our ideas and the accurate adjustment of our matter is of little importance, especially when addressing ordinary congregations. But this is a great mistake. The most uncultivated minds love order, and unconsciously attend to a well-arranged address; they remember and understand it more easily. Hence there are advantages in studying the structure of our discourses, their method and order. There must be in every sermon a commencement,—that is, an *introduction*. The *body* of the discourse must contain elucidation or discussion, or exposition, and towards the close there should be some special appeal to the heart and conscience,—that is, an *application*. It is true that the perfection of such a composition is when an experienced speaker or writer can throw off the trammels and crutches of heads—one, two, and three—and of sub-divisions multiplied; the orderly matter flowing in such just and natural sequence, each idea rising out of the preceding, that unity is preserved, repetition avoided, the memory helped, and the mind replenished with rich thoughts; but how rare a gift is this! The confused, inconsequential, desultory sermons, too often heard, prove how much better most men would be for a little scholastic discipline in the treatment of their subjects. The danger of slavery to a system is far less imminent than that of falling into an idle, desultory habit of thought and composition; such discourses can produce no permanent impression upon the mind of the hearers. It is true, there may be division without arrangement, and there may be arrangement without formal division; but if in one way or the other there be not **METHOD**—a true and natural distribution of the subject-matter of the text—there can be little mental food conveyed to them that hear.

Not only so,—a neat, pertinent, short, antithetical arrangement often tends to fix important truth upon the mind and memory, so that it will

never be effaced ; sometimes, when the order of the matter is easy, ready-made, and almost unavoidable, such a definition of it is, nevertheless, of great importance : (*e.g.*), Romans viii. 13,—“ If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die : but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” Here is,—I. A LIFE THAT LEADS TO DEATH ; and II. A DEATH THAT LEADS TO LIFE. Or Revelation i. 8,—“ Which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” Contemplate your God and Saviour,—I. AS HE WAS. II. AS HE IS. III. AS HE IS TO COME. Or an historical subject, as Exodus v. 2,—I. PHARAOH’S DARING PROFANENESS. II. HIS TRANSIENT CONVICTIONS. III. HIS MISERABLE END. Or Psalm lxxxiv. 11,—“ For the Lord God is a sun and a shield : the Lord will give grace and glory : no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”—I. WHAT GOD IS TO HIS PEOPLE. II. WHAT GOD DOES FOR HIS PEOPLE. III. THE CHARACTER WHICH HIS PEOPLE BEAR. Or Acts xx. 21,—I. THE SUBSTANCE OF THE APOSTLE’S DOCTRINE. II. THE PERSONS TO WHOM HE DELIVERED IT. III. THE ZEAL WITH WHICH HE URGED IT.

Bad arrangements and clumsy divisions are like an instrument out of tune ; but let them be good, forcible, apposite, neat, and the eye, and the ear, and the fancy combine with the memory to convey truth to the heart through those pleasant channels which the God of nature has prepared for the influx of His grace to the soul !

But now I approach my work more nearly. Here is my text,—a verse, or a paragraph, or a clause of a verse,—what am I to do ? Shall I think over it a little ; set down one or two sentences, and put 1, 2, 3, before them, and then write off what comes uppermost ? No ! Such a written composition is the worst sort of extempore preaching ! First, you must thoroughly sift the meaning of the passage. Be sure you understand your text yourself, before you attempt to explain it to others. Read it in the original ; examine the context ; satisfy yourself respecting the mind of the inspired writer. On no account consult commentators, text-books, or divines upon the subject, until you have exhausted the resources of your own mind ; otherwise you will become the mere retailer of other men’s ideas, without any character or style of your own.

Go to them afterwards to correct your judgment, or to enrich or enlarge your discussion, but work on your own stores first. Ask yourself, What is the leading idea, object, purpose of the divine writer or speaker in this passage? There always is one, and a principal one: search for it till you find it: having found it, grasp it firmly; never lose sight of it; it is to be the centre light of your picture, the grand subject of your discourse, to which everything else is to be subordinated:—this is the thought, the truth, the doctrine, the command, which you are to illustrate, or vindicate, or explain, or recommend, or apply—you must work from it and to it—rejecting all subjects, however tempting, which do not necessarily spring out of it, or lead you to it.

There is a force, a power, a clearness in such preaching, which commends itself at once to the understanding and hearts of the hearers: they are arrested, convinced, edified; they cannot tell you why; but it is because some great thought out of the mind of God has been held up to them simply and sensibly; it has been placed before them in this light and in that light, appearing fresh and new, but still enforcing or illustrating only one point.

There is also an *idiosyncrasy* (I have no better word and must repeat it) in every text of Scripture, which must be discovered and made much of. Common and comparatively few as are the great leading truths of Revelation, yet they are never placed before us in any two verses of Scripture with absolute uniformity: there is some individuality or peculiarity in every introduction of them. It may be such words as heaven or hell, or life or death, or judgment or salvation, &c.; but if we examine the passage in which they occur accurately, we shall find some particular light thrown upon them, some peculiarity of expression, or illustration, or allusion, which stamps *speciality* on their use:—upon the observance or non-observance of these apparently nice distinctions the whole complexion of our teaching may depend! Hopeless monotony and dull generalities will characterize his productions who is insensible to these way-marks of Scripture. Some such leading word catches his eye, —a word which occurs in hundreds of other passages: on this he spins; and around it he winds his own dull thoughts—all very good and true, it

may be, in themselves,—but altogether missing their peculiar force, beauty, and appositeness in this particular passage, he writes a sermon which might follow fifty other texts—a sermon, the professed subject of which is taken out of God's Word, but the matter of which is the product of his own mind, and so it loses all Divine power. Whereas he who has a keen discernment of the specialities of the text will throw around a common topic, or familiar word, a seeming novelty and charm, which are but the clear reflexion of the original.

When we begin to write on any text, it is almost as important to consider what we are not to say as what we should say; to reject that which does not directly rise out of it or belong to it, or anything which, even belonging to the subject, would encumber it, and hinder its elucidation. We should avoid, as dangerous temptations, all fine-spun theories, and elaborate, ingenious arguments, or metaphors and figures merely decorative, and calculated rather to display the wit, and fancy, and imagination of the preacher, than to throw light or power into the subject, and simply committing ourselves to the teaching of the text, following it confidently, digging deeply in search of its hidden treasures, we should spread them out fully before our hearers, and then we shall be evangelists indeed!

Having observed all these rules, and well thought out your text, take a rough sheet of paper and briefly and tersely write down the thoughts which have occurred to you; follow out the ideas suggested by your text; don't perplex yourself at first with arrangement; sometimes it will flow forth naturally; if not, when you have accumulated the materials of your discourse, a little inspection of your paper will suggest the order in which you are to place them; the relative weight and importance of each proposition will indicate its position as a main head or subordinate one, and so eventually you will find your way to a symmetrical composition, which will bear the formal adaptation of **FIRST**, **SECOND**, and **THIRD**, as the case may be; let *arrangement*, true, just, and natural, come first, and then *division* will follow of itself. The grand desideratum is an easy, natural flow of ideas, fairly suggested by the text, springing out of one another, so that the mind of God may be discovered and conveyed to the audience with the greatest possible effect. The positive, spiritual result

must, we know, in every case, depend on the exercise of Divine grace, which no preacher can command; so, too, do the fruits of the earth depend on the blessing of heaven, its warm suns, refreshing showers, and genial growing weather, yet the crops will be affected by the measure of skill, science, and liberality with which the farmer cultivates his land; and so is it in our spiritual husbandry; to make the sovereignty of God's grace an excuse for idleness, or to depreciate skill, talent, labour, in the preparation of our work for the pulpit, because all the sufficiency is of God, is one of the worst forms of practical Antinomianism.

In considering the structure of a sermon and its several parts, the INTRODUCTION—something prefatory, as a commencement—demands our attention.

As a general rule, unless some very happy thought occurs, it is better to leave the composition of this to the last; like the preface to a book, it is generally more valuable when written after the body of the work is completed.

But consider the object of prefatory remarks; it is not merely to write something because all things must have a beginning; an INTRODUCTION forms a very important part of the discourse, if well managed; we wish to gain attention, to excite an interest, to remove prejudice, to claim authority, or some explanation may be necessary, some reference to the context, and without anticipating any subsequent matter, the general character of the discourse may be indicated. There should be a strict uniformity between the introduction and that which follows, a harmony of colouring and tone; a cheerful subject should be opened cheerfully, a penitential one sorrowfully, an argumentative one by some appeal to known truths. There is much room for ingenuity and tact in this part of a sermon, and it is also easy to fall into some conceit and affectation. A far-fetched exordium, like some of the prefatory observations in the leading articles in the public journals, which tax your wit to discover to what subject they may introduce you, is greatly to be avoided. If the opening remarks are too striking the sermon will appear tame; an abrupt, forcible, clever commencement may fix attention, but it is difficult to sustain such a tone, and if there is a failure, a fatal calm will be found

towards the close of the discourse. It is always desirable to keep the introduction half-a-note below the rest of the sermon, that the address may rise in interest and importance as you proceed. Not unfrequently you may find some expressions or allusion in your text which does not fall appropriately under any head of your sermon; this may serve as an introduction. Above all, beware of being too long or diffuse in your prefatory work; take heed to symmetry; let every limb of your discourse have its due place and proportion, that there be no deformity in the whole body. If you succeed in composing an easy, natural, pleasing introduction, you have already won, at the hands of your hearers, a ready attention to what follows. Careful revision of this part of your composition will repay your labour.

In offering suggestions for the distribution of matter in the body of a discourse there is the utmost difficulty, because there is such diversity in the topics to be handled. The schoolmen speak of two distinct methods of treating a scriptural subject, under one of which every discourse must be placed: viz., TEXTUALLY or TOPICALLY. In the former, the text, verse, or passage of Scripture is minutely examined, and each clause is ranged under its appropriate head or division, so that every sentence and expression has its share of attention. In the latter case the general idea, or proposition of the passage, is treated as a theme or topic, according to the purpose of the writer. The former method is, generally speaking, the safest and the most profitable, tending rather to realize the great object of preaching, the unfolding, developing, and applying of the Word of God itself. It is manifest that this system is more appropriate to some portions of the Word of God than to others. Historical, devotional, proverbial, illustrative portions of God's Word cannot be all treated alike, nor reduced to systematic proportions. The mode of dealing with these masses of Scripture will appear when I speak of expository instruction. Only a few general rules can be suggested, and then perhaps an example or two may be worked out illustrative of the arrangement of a subject.

Do not think it necessary to have a certain number of principal heads and inferior subdivisions: *matter* is to be thought out and distributed;

its order and succession may be subsequently determined. Sometimes the inversion of the several parts of the verse is necessary for its better elucidation, or for memory's sake; sometimes, perhaps more frequently, the natural order of the words is the best. The mode in which any particular verse, or clause of a verse, shall be treated, that is, whether it shall be handled *textually* or *topically*, is the first point to be settled in your own mind. Some subjects are capable of either treatment; and in some instances possibly a mixed method may be introduced.

In order to illustrate by an example the twofold method of treating a subject take a simple text, Psalm cv. 3, "Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord." To treat this *textually* I must consider, I. THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS SPOKEN OF,— "Those who seek the Lord." II. THEIR PRIVILEGE, OR THE EXHORTATION ADDRESSED TO THEM,— "Let their hearts rejoice."

Thus treated, I must enlarge under the first head upon the expression, "to seek the Lord," as a generic term, showing that it includes every stage of the Divine life in the soul; the awakened sinner "seeks Him;" the feeble believer "seeks Him;" the advancing Christian "seeks Him;" and the servant of God, expecting immediate glory, "seeks Him." The appropriateness of the definition to each of these might be usefully discussed and enlarged upon. And then under the II. head— THE REASON WHY SUCH PERSONS OUGHT TO BE HAPPY AND REJOICE: show what God has done to make them happy—the rich provision for their comfort and enjoyment. How their joys are in Him and not in themselves. How he has pardoned, accepted, justified, and will sanctify and glorify them. How all things conspire for their good in time and in eternity. Who should be happy if they are not? Then inquiries would arise in *the application*, How is it with God's people? Whether they are happy; and why not? Concluding with the exhortation in v. 4.

On the other hand, I might wish to take up such a subject as a TOPIC, a THESIS. Having perhaps often dwelt on "seeking the Lord," I might not think it necessary to enlarge on that generic term in the body of my discourse, but I might make some terse observations on it in the introduction, showing how appropriate such a phrase is to all stages of

the life of God in the soul. I then take up the manifest purport of the text, whether it be understood as an exhortation or a declaration of what ought to be; the clear meaning is **THAT GOD'S PEOPLE SHOULD BE A HAPPY PEOPLE**; that it is both their duty and privilege to rejoice; and this being seldom their normal state, it would be quite legitimate to inquire why it is not so? Our subject would then fall into this train of discussion: **I. THAT IT IS GOD'S WILL THAT HIS PEOPLE SHOULD BE HAPPY. II. THAT, NEVERTHELESS, FEW ARE SO. III. ENDEAVOUR TO ACCOUNT FOR THIS DEFECT IN THEM.***

Again, suppose we select a more complicated text, and endeavour to picture out the process of reflexion by which all its matter may be developed and its parts adjusted, nothing being omitted. John iv. 21—24: "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

This passage is evidently full of matter, replete with rich thoughts, spiritual, experimental, practical; but how to distribute them in their proper order, and to give each its due portion of consideration, is not so easy. Searching for the leading idea, I must not forget the character of the speaker, nor the main object of his discourse with the woman whom He was addressing. But for this consideration it would seem that our Lord's chief design was to show forth the true nature and being of the Almighty: "God is a SPIRIT," and thrice He calls Him "A FATHER;" and by his reasoning in verse 22 he clearly discovers the character of God as a SAVIOUR,—“We know what we worship.” Why? “Because salvation is of the Jews.” We know God, therefore, as a SAVIOUR. Here, then, we have a threefold description of the Almighty. He is A SPIRIT, A FATHER, A SAVIOUR! Yet this is not the leading idea of the text: the topic, the subject of it, is **THE WORSHIP OF GOD**—how He is to

* See the sketch on this text.

be worshipped, and where ! This was the question which our Lord was answering. The woman had said, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, but ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." And our Lord's reply is intended to set her right as to the nature of God and the worship of God. "Worship" is the leading word and idea in each verse. How and where we should worship God. Seize on this word as the thread of the passage, and it will lead you to a clear, succinct, and happy arrangement. The true nature of worship will be naturally suggested by the object of our worship. See, if God is "a SPIRIT," his worship must be SPIRITUAL ; if "a FATHER," our worship must be that of CHILDREN ; if a "SAVIOUR," we must worship Him as SINNERS ; and the place of worship our Lord determines (in verse 21) under the Gospel dispensation to be ANYWHERE ! Now then, our matter assumes shape and symmetry. The worship of God is the great subject of the text ; and respecting it our Lord teaches us—I. THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP. II. THE NATURE OF WORSHIP. III. THE PLACE OF WORSHIP. THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP—God, A SPIRIT, A FATHER, A SAVIOUR. THE NATURE OF WORSHIP—SPIRITUAL, FILIAL, as SINNERS to a SAVIOUR. THE PLACE OF WORSHIP—neither in Jerusalem nor Samaria, but ANYWHERE !

But two portions of our discourse are untouched : the INTRODUCTION and APPLICATION. And first of the latter.

If the occasion were an ordinary one the application might be interrogatory. What God do you worship ? A Spirit ? A Father ? A Saviour ? Do you know God as such ? Do you worship Him in spirit and in truth ? No other worship can be accepted ! Seek the teaching of the Holy Spirit that you may know the true God, love Him, and worship Him aright.

If the occasion were special, as a consecration, or a collection for the expenses of a church, or such like, you would speak of the privileges of the Gospel dispensation, of the lawfulness of worshipping God anywhere, and yet the propriety of a special house for his glory, &c., &c.

Still the INTRODUCTION remains to be considered. This subject would admit of several appropriate exordiums. A very brief reference to

the occasion of our Lord's meeting with the Samaritan woman might be suitable. Or if the season called for it, or allowed it, you might notice the breaking down of the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles—the favour shown here and on other occasions to individual Gentiles by our Lord, &c. Or if it were a consecration sermon, or such like, the **AUTHORITY** of the Divine speaker might be enforced as that which must settle all controversies.

But when a subject is so full as this is, the less that is said in the introduction the better, and care should be taken not to anticipate the matter of the text : the introduction should be quite subordinate.

Here we may notice a method by which you may test your arrangements, heads, and sub-divisions, in any discourse. If on examination you discover that matter which you have allotted to one head can be appropriately said under another, be sure your arrangement is faulty ; or if you find that any important portion of your text does not rightly fall under any one of your heads or sub-divisions, then too, is your arrangement faulty and deficient. Compare the schedule of your discourse with the text itself ; does it bear the same proportion in each of its parts to the other as the text itself does ? This rule is not without exception, for you may wish to press one point more than another on your hearers, or to enlarge on one branch of the subject more particularly : but then you should say so, and explain it.

The very great importance to be attached to this system of arrangement may further appear by considering the consequences of a neglect of it. Take an example. A preacher selects this text, 2 Cor. iv. 18 : " While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen ; for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

He opens with the word *eternity* ; he enters upon a philosophical definition of it, and an attempt to explain it, past and future. To help us he introduces the eternal God as a personification of eternity. On these topics he occupies one-third of his time. He then dwells upon the vast importance of eternal things, and shows their excellence in comparison with those of time, enlarging on the shortness and vanity of life.

He then proceeds to a lengthened and desultory application of the subject, exhorting the people to attend to the concerns of their immortal souls.

Now all that this preacher said was good and true; but it had this fault, that the same things might have been said with equal propriety on any text in the Bible in which the word eternity occurs. Neither was the principal fault of his religious essay simply that it was pointless, and, consequently, unimpressive and common-place, but that it failed entirely to notice the real meaning and proper application of the passage: and this is the greatest fault which, as a Scripture expositor, any preacher can commit. If I take a verse and apply it in a sense totally foreign to the meaning of the writer, though what I say may be all true and good, I no longer have the authority of that writer to support me, but I substitute my own thoughts for his. In speaking of things temporal and things eternal St. Paul was not urging considerations for the conversion of worldlings, but announcing a great Gospel truth respecting himself and all true believers, viz., that "WHILE they looked," and kept their eye fixed by faith on eternal things, their faith enabled them to rejoice in their afflictions, and esteem them as light, however heavy they might be; and as short, however long! The words, "WHILE WE LOOK," are the key to the speciality of this text; and that grand and leading idea was never so much as noticed in this discourse. In fact it was a dull essay on time and eternity, as a motive to careless worldlings to awake, instead of an inspiring and glorious truth for the comfort of believers, and to stimulate them to active exertion or patient suffering. These abstract generalities chill the audience, or soothe them to slumber; they stamp feebleness on our ministry, and make every sermon appear common-place; whereas, if we have a quick perception of the special force and meaning of every passage in God's Word, and keep to that, and work that out, we may preach for twenty years in the same place and none will complain of want of interest or *freshness* in our discourses. Hundreds of specimens of the desultory style of preaching might be cited; and yet the source of the evil is not suspected. The hearers complain of dulness, and the preacher himself may be painfully conscious

of it, and yet the remedy is at hand. Take the Word of God and work it out: extract its essence as the chemist does his medicines from his vegetable and mineral substances; don't write anything upon it, about it, from it, out of your own head, but search diligently, pray fervently, think intensely on the sense and meaning of God's Holy Word, and deal out *that* to the people. And then, though you may not attain to artistic symmetry in your arrangement, nor to the logical sequence of some writers, you will spread before the people what God says, his thoughts and words, and not your own, and life and power shall be infused into your ministrations.

But a most important part of every discourse yet claims our thoughtful consideration, namely, the APPLICATION. This is often regarded as a mere conclusion, a winding-up of the discourse, with a remark or two specially applicable to the audience. But in one sense the entire sermon should be application; not indeed in the wearisome way in which some preachers are continually introducing the expression, "Now, my brethren," or "Dear brother," which are often mere expletives to fill up a hiatus: but the whole pith, marrow, and substance of a sermon should have a definite bearing and adaptation to the audience. As in the choice of our subjects, we have seen that special reference should be had to the character of the people we are about to address, so in the particular handling of our matter, the same object should ever be kept in view. Oh what precious opportunities are lost for awakening sinners and saving souls by vapid discussions of unedifying matter, disquisitions about various readings, authorities, or even questions of secular learning, which may be excellent in their proper place, but are mere trifling in the pulpit. *Cui bono?* Let us always ask, What good will this do to them that hear? Have I not a more important message to deliver? They will think me dull and prosy if I exceed the half-hour—how precious, then, is every minute! This, then, is a fundamental principle to be wrought into every sacred discourse; whether I am expounding, or explaining, or discussing, or whatever branch of my subject I may be handling, I must ever keep in view how far what I am saying is applicable, profitable, suitable, to the particular congregation I am addressing.

But beyond this there is much need of more direct and specific application. Men are naturally disposed to evade self-appropriation in this matter, and to apply what is said to their neighbours: "How suitable that was to such an one! I wonder how such a person could sit and hear such truths and not blush!" But few, few are inclined to say, "Lord, is it I?" It must therefore, be our business not only to make truth plain, but so forcibly to apply it to different classes of persons that none may escape our warnings.

Artistically speaking, this may be done in different ways, according to the nature of the subject, and our mode of treating it. Sometimes—but rarely—we may venture upon a very strong initiatory appeal in our introduction. More frequently brief and striking appeals to the conscience may be introduced at the close of some head or sub-division, as, "How does this apply to you? Do you feel this truth? Admit this proposition," &c.

But a sermon should rarely conclude without some personal address—a few practical and searching questions—and generally something of a classification may be attempted: as specially addressed to the young or the old, the rich or the poor, the converted or the unconverted, the careless or the pious.

But here let me again urge the great importance of keeping in view the principles of composition already laid down. Nothing so soon degenerates into a dull mannerism as general applications and conclusions. It is here that the preacher's determination to preserve the unity of his discourse and the peculiarity of his text and subject should appear. The application must take its tint and hue from the general colour of the discourse, and rise naturally and gracefully out of it: this will always give freshness and point to the appeal. Men will often receive a reproof, or a warning, or an exhortation, which manifestly suggests itself from the subject, while they would feel it offensive and personal if, without such a fair suggestion, the preacher spontaneously censured them. Our wisdom is not only to clothe our ideas as much as possible with Scripture language, but to make our audience feel that the ideas themselves are not our own, but the manifest product of the Word of God, suggested by

the text, and as it were a burden laid upon us to deliver to them : " Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel ! " In no part of our sermon do we need so much to shield ourselves under Divine authority as in the application ; we must here assume the dignity of our office, " and reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all authority," but in no part do we need so much humility, gentleness, love, tenderness, and discretion. A harsh and damnable manner in our personal application will destroy all good. " Speaking the truth in love ! "

Our remarks hitherto have had reference only to the construction of a set discourse or sermon,—a mode of teaching to which every pastor may well confine himself at least once a-week. But every diligent servant of God will find many opportunities when the stateliness of a studied oration would be quite out of place ; at his second service, or in his cottage lectures, he wants more breadth of Scripture instruction, larger masses of God's Word, with some simpler mode of elucidation and application. EXPOSITORY PREACHING is a most important branch of our ministry, for which we have rich supplies in the animated narratives, the pictorial biography, the national histories, the vast and comprehensive prophecies, together with the holy, devotional portions of God's Word. Here is scope for every variety of expository teaching. But while the nicely poised division and the neat arrangement are here out of place, yet should method and natural, inferential order be observed on all occasions. There may be danger in some cases of falling into stiffness and formality, but the desultory talk, sometimes dignified with the term exposition, is a far more common danger. Having, in a somewhat lengthened ministry, travelled twice through the entire Old Testament histories, and also twice through a harmony of the New Testament story, having expounded the Book of Psalms twice, and the Prophet Isaiah, the Gospel of St. John, the Acts of the Apostles, once, besides courses through the Articles of the Church of England, the daily, and most of the Occasional Services, I feel somewhat qualified to speak of the difficulties and the advantages of such methods of teaching. I confidently bear witness to the excellence of such modes of instruction. Consecutive narratives keep the people together, and maintain much

interest and the importance, both to pastors and people, of traversing so large a breadth of the surface of Scripture cannot be over-estimated. It tends to destroy narrow systems of divinity, cramped and stunted views of truth; it constrains the pastor to grapple with the difficulties of revelation, and honestly meet them; while it brings before the people a variety of practical topics which otherwise never would have been selected for special consideration.

Excellence in this department of our ministrations is more difficult of attainment than in any other; a larger acquaintance with the Word of God and the writings of our Church is requisite, and our natural gifts are here more generally developed. Dull mediocrity in this, is easily attainable; but to keep up an interest in a lengthened course requires much study, preparation, prayer, and faith.

A few general observations are all we can give to help a beginner in this excellent work.

Different portions of Scripture should be differently handled. Thus the devotional Psalms rarely admit of any arrangement; their different clauses refuse to be grouped in order, and any one who, like Matthew Henry, the pious commentator, attempts so to arrange them, will, like him, strip them of their peculiar beauty and power. The only key to a profitable exposition of a succession of prayers and praises, or each alternating, is to watch the ebb and flow of the devotional feeling—to mark its transitions and fluctuations, and to follow with spiritual comment whithersoever it leads. But to attempt to reduce the outpourings of such a soul as David's into method and order of discussion is to strip it of its peculiar character, and necessarily to fall into dulness or conceit. Still the pious thoughts which are suggested may admit, either in elucidation or application, of some natural sequence and suggestiveness.

A selection of biographical sketches, especially from the Old Testament, often proves very interesting and profitable. All the ordinary rules of such composition then come to our aid, never forgetting that the original pictures are drawn by Him who reads the heart, and that we are not therefore at liberty to criticise, or judge as we might do when dealing with uninspired biography.

In following the Bible history from the beginning, and tracing it through successive ages to the period when it ceases, great judgment and prudence are needed. Sometimes it is better to tell the story in our own language, and draw our inferences or make our practical observations; sometimes to let the Bible tell its own facts, in its own impressive terms. There are indeed, circumstances of human atrocity recorded in the sacred pages, which it is manifestly indecorous to repeat in the congregation; but their general outlines are well-known, and it is better only to refer to them as deplorable exhibitions of man's depravity, suggestive of good, and useful, and practical lessons, without at all entering into details: always vindicating the fidelity of God's Word in recording them, and showing the necessity of such testimonies to the radical corruption of human nature.

In passing through such books as Leviticus and Deuteronomy, a selection of good texts may be found in succeeding chapters, which may be connected by rapid allusion to the intermediate matter. When a course of lectures on the Mosaic dispensation is pursued, more accurate investigation would be required. So also with respect to the prophetical writers; they should be treated according to our purpose in selecting them. A course on prophecy is a different thing from a course of instruction on the writings of a particular Prophet. I might adopt a series of lectures on the Prophet Ezekiel or Isaiah, dealing with the matter rather with a view to spiritual and practical instruction than to the interpretation of prophetic vision. In this case the purely prophetical character of the book may be touched slightly, while its capacity of immediate application might be exhibited more at length.

EXPOSITORY INSTRUCTION ALMOST IMPLIES THE NECESSITY OF AN EXTEMPORE DELIVERY. Such lectures may no doubt be well written, and if well delivered, may be very useful; but this description of biblical instruction is evidently more natural, and if tolerably done, much more impressive in the extempore form. Speaking from the pulpit at all from a written discourse is altogether a modern invention, chiefly an English one, and the product of a non-religious age. The limits which I have proposed to myself for these cursory observations will not allow me to

discuss the merits of either plan. It is obvious that a good written sermon is far better than a bad extempore one; yet it is equally true that a good extempore sermon is the highest style of preaching, the most natural, the most impressive, and that which invariably fixes the attention more than any written sermon, however excellent.

When I use the word "**EXTEMPORE**," I mean it simply with respect to the **LANGUAGE**. Extempore thought, or extempore composition, or anything indeed extempore except the delivery, is an insult alike to God and the people. To deliver ourselves well without book, we must have mastered our subject, explored it deeply, arranged it carefully, and must, like a painter, carry the entire image of our finished discourse before our eyes into the pulpit, or we shall be mere praters, not preachers. If extempore preaching has fallen into discredit, it is because those who have adopted it have not done the practice justice. Very few persons have a strong natural gift of extemporaneous speech; but much propriety and facility of delivery may be acquired by most persons by diligence and perseverance, if it be early attempted. It is a very rare case indeed if any one has reached the age of forty or forty-five years without acquiring this power, and afterwards excels in it. While it is most desirable that young pastors should conscientiously persevere for the first ten or fifteen years of their ministry in preaching written sermons, yet I am of opinion that in some way or other, either in cottage lectures or in lectures in the church, they should from the very beginning endeavour to acquire the habit of expressing themselves with propriety upon any subject which they may have prepared, without the assistance even of notes before them. The time, or half the time, required for the mechanical process of writing a sermon or a lecture, if conscientiously devoted to reflection, reading, and prayer, would yield a harvest of rich truths for the people which would surprise both the taught and the teacher.

I cannot conclude these cursory and imperfect observations on this great subject without reminding my readers that no perfection in the art of composition, no powers of oratory, no human eloquence can avail for the adequate discharge of the functions of the sacred teacher, unless he draws his matter from the deep inner fountains of his own personal expe-

rience, and depends for his success upon the constant, unfailing, and promised help of God's Holy Spirit. It was not merely the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles themselves which converted the ancient Pagan world, but its preaching "with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven." "Paul might plant," and the eloquent "Apollos water;" but God alone gave the increase. Without this aid the whole system of religious parochial instruction is but a lifeless and cumbrous machinery, —and this aid is given only to earnest prayer and patient waiting upon God. What profound study; what constant meditation and searching of God's Word; what large and comprehensive views of the revelation of God as a whole; what deep personal application of truth in all its power, fulness, and sweetness to the soul; what intimate communion and near walking with God are needful for him who would suitably nourish up the people in word and doctrine, commending to them God's truth by the holiness, spirituality, and consistency of his life.

Oh that it would please God to raise up among us an increasing number of holy men, who to all the advantages of cultivated and well-disciplined minds add the sterling goodness of true piety,—men "taught of God" themselves, and therefore "able to teach others also;" "led by the Spirit," and therefore able to lead others; "giving themselves wholly to the work," and counting all things but loss that they may win Christ for themselves, and draw others to Him!

"Merciful Lord, we beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon thy Church, that it being enlightened by the doctrine of thy blessed apostles and evangelists, may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."



SKETCHES OF SERMONS.

I.

GODLINESS UNIVERSALLY PROFITABLE.

1 Timothy iv. 8. "*But godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*"

HOW pleasant is a promise, especially when it is made by one whom we know, and love, and can trust: what then, must the promise of God be? The promise here is not made to persons, as to godly persons, but it is wrapt up in a condition of character—in GODLINESS! Godliness has promise—twofold—of the life present, and the life future.

May God help us with his holy Spirit while we examine—

I. THE NATURE OF TRUE GODLINESS.

II. THE TWOFOLD PROMISE ANNEXED TO IT.

I. GODLINESS. A noble, comprehensive word. *It is not mere morality*, nor a dogmatic system; it is not peculiar to any dispensation: it existed in Adam, descended to Enoch, was found in Noah and the Patriarchs, was common to the Mosaic and Christian dispensation, and is confined to no external Church nor sect—it scorns all less distinctions—it is simply GODLINESS.

—The *word* is derived from GOD! and the thing itself is of God.

—*it is God's gift, and his work on the soul, &c.*

—*it leads to God*, unites with Him, and dwells in Him, has union and communion with Him.

- it fills the soul with God's love.*
- it makes a man godly, pious, holy, spiritual, obedient.*
- it conforms us to the image of God.*
- it makes us do all to the glory of God.*
- It is an absorbing, dominant, pervading, influential principle of piety in the soul, subduing all other principles and affections to its sway.*

II. THIS GODLINESS CARRIES WITH IT A TWOFOLD PROMISE, "and is, therefore, profitable for all things."

1. It has promise of the life that now is.

—The men of the world think religion all very well for the sick, the old, the dying, but regard it as unfit for this present world, something that lies without it, and regard it as intrusive if it interferes with them : we affirm just the contrary.

—*What is this present life ?* Let us do it justice ! There is much in it that is pleasant—many happy days, many comforts, much enjoyment, &c. But it is a chequered life ; much of sorrow too. Sickness, pain, grief, poverty, trial—trouble sooner or later to all ; and certain death at the end of it. And all this because it is a sinful state, guilty and corrupt.

—*Godliness has a promise for it all. A promise for our brighter days—making them doubly bright. A promise for our saddest days—telling of joy and peace. A promise for our busy days—supporting, guiding, blessing us in the bustle of life. A promise for our sinful days—telling of mercy, pardon, peace to penitent, mourning souls in Christ. And a promise for our dying day—"when our flesh and our heart fail, &c."* *Godliness is profitable for this present life—it is good for time ; if there were no eternity, still godliness the best for everything here.* (Deut. vii. 12, cum Matt. vi. 33 ; Mark x. 29 ; Ephes. vi. 2, 3.)

2. It has promise of that which is to come. There is—

—*A life to come !* Who doubts it ? Not the Indian who causes his bow and arrows and faithful dog to be buried with him ; nor the New Zealander, who sees in the stars the eyes of his departed chief. Not the ancient heathen, who expected Elysian fields ; only the cold-blooded modern infidel. God forgive him ! Immortality is an instinct in man.

—*But what does man know of it by nature ?* Nothing ; absolutely nothing ! Not one step beyond the grave—not one moment after death—dark, unknown, unexplored !—guesses, desires, imaginings, but he knows nothing.

—*Godliness alone has promise of a happy futurity.* *Revelation—the Bible*—and the Spirit of God, unfolding the Word of God, has, by Christ Jesus, “opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.”

—Partially, it is true—“it doth not yet appear what we shall be”—curiosity is checked—while faith is strengthened; for this we know, “that when he shall appear we shall be like him and see him as he is!” (1 John iii. 2.)

—*Godliness has the promise of it, whatever it may be.* “Glory, honour, eternal life.” Innumerable promises. Our Lord again and again—“I will raise him up at the last day.” (John v. and vi.; Mark x. 30.) “In the world to come, life eternal.” (Ephes. i. 3; Heb. vi. 5; Rom. ii. 7; and chap. vi. 12.) “Lay hold on eternal life.” (1 John ii. 25.) “This is the promise that he has promised us, even eternal life.”

—“Surely godliness is profitable for all things”—in all time, in eternity, in this world and all its changes, and in the world to come, where there is no change!

—*Such exceeding great and precious promises need the solemn ratification of the verse following:*—“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation.”

—*Have you accepted it?* That is, are you a *godly man*? I do not ask, are you moral, honourable, benevolent, amiable, generous, charitable,—but are you **GODLY**? What are you towards God, what with God alone? What in prayer, in secret devotion? What principle of the faith and fear and love of God is there in the heart? Search and see—the religion which saves is not a doctrine, an opinion, a sect; it is not orthodoxy, it is not heterodoxy, it is God’s love, faith, fear, hope, obedience in a heart reconciled to Him by Christ Jesus. Rest not until you have this,—“Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Col. i. 27.) And then you are safe for both worlds,—“That which now is, and that which is to come!”

II.

LIFE IS CHRIST—DEATH IS GAIN.

Philippians i. 21. "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*"

NO less confidence than this could have carried the apostle and his companions through their suffering life to glory. He was "in deaths oft" (2 Cor. xi. 23), exposed to a thousand dangers; a doubting, hesitating, faltering experience never could have sustained him. This is fully admitted by many who do not perceive that nothing less than the same experience can conquer sin, support in trial, or bring any one of us to glory.

St. Paul's was the *normal state* of every true believer, not an exceptional, extraordinary one, such as Satan and blind men represent it to be.

May the Spirit of God enable us to understand and experience the truth of this!

I. THE BELIEVER'S LIFE—IT "IS CHRIST!"

II. HIS DEATH;—IT "IS GAIN!"

I. A definition so terse, pithy, comprehensive, yet powerful and definite, was perhaps never written. "To me to live—is Christ;" my life is Christ, my existence, my being, my occupation, my citizenship, my whole, is absorbed in Christ, is hidden in Christ, is neither more nor less than Christ himself: so entirely am I in Christ, and Christ in me! Wonderful, spiritual, holy mystery! Let us try to explain it.

1. "To me to live is Christ," because Christ is my life: I live by Him, and on Him, and in Him! *Conversion is the formation of Christ in me*: "Of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." (Galatians iv. 19.) "Christ in you the hope of glory." (Col. i. 27.) "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear." "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, &c." (Galatians ii. 20.) These and many other testimonies prove that my entire spiritual being originated in Christ, is sustained from hour to hour by union with Him, as the limb in the body, as the branch in the tree: so that "to me to live is Christ."

2. This is true, also, because in Him and by Him I am dead to everything else : all my enemies are slain in Him and by Him, and, as long as I live in Him, I am dead to them, and they to me ! “ I am crucified with Christ ” (Galatians ii. 20), to the world, to sin, to Satan. “ They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its affections, &c.” (Gal. v. 24.) “ Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Col. iii. 3.) “ I die daily.”
3. “ To me to live is Christ,” because He has become the one great object of interest to me in my daily life. All my joys and sorrows, my cares and pleasures, centre in Him, spring out of Him, and flow back to Him. His name, his honour, his praise, his cause, his people, his glory,—these are the chief thoughts of my daily life ! How to win souls for Him, how to publish his love, how to overthrow his enemies, sin, the world, and the devil—this is the absorbing object of my being.
4. “ To me to live is Christ,” because I live on Him, by Him, with Him. I walk with Him, and He with me ; talk with Him, think on his name, have much communion, real and actual, with Him, pray to Him, praise Him, delight myself in Him, sing songs to Him, adore Him, and love Him with my whole heart. I enjoy his intimate friendship, counsel, advice, direction, solace, consolation. He is dear to me, “ chiefest among ten thousand,” “ and altogether lovely.” (Sol. Song v. 10, 16.) He has my whole heart, and “ He has loved me with an everlasting love.”
5. “ To me to live is Christ,” because through this union with Him I bear much fruit. “ Abide in me and I in you ; ” “ He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.” (John xv. 4, 9.) “ Thou hast wrought all our works in us.” (Isa. xxvi. 12.) “ From me is thy fruit found.” (Hosea xiv. 8.) If planted with Him, and watered by Him, bring forth fruit in due season, &c. (Psalm i. 3.) Utterly barren, withered, and dried up in myself, while I live on Him, and in Him, and his life is in me, “ I abound in love and good works.” “ I cannot be barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Him.” Here is my holiness, sanctification, victory,—where my pardon and peace are, all in Christ,—his life-blood flows in my veins,—his virtue heals. “ I am sanctified in Christ Jesus ; ” without Him, separate from Him, “ I can do nothing ; ” “ but I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.” Therefore, every way, “ TO ME, TO LIVE, IS CHRIST ! ”

II. THE BELIEVER’S DEATH—“ to die is gain ! ”

1. This can be asserted and proved generally of all true believers. The

highest spiritual life and the happiest earthly life is but an imperfect state, interrupted, disturbed, mingled with trials, sorrows, temptations; it never can fully satisfy the cravings of a spiritual mind: "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness" (Psalm xvii. 15)—never till then!

2. But there is special and peculiar force in this declaration here; it has immediate affinity with that which has gone before. *It is because "this life is Christ that death is gain!"* See the context—v. 20—23: Because "Christ was magnified in his body, whether by life or death," "and because to him to live was Christ," therefore "death was gain," and therefore "he was in a strait betwixt the two," &c. *"To me to die is gain," because death perfects and completes my present existence in Christ.*

- (a) Now *Christ is with me spiritually where I am.* I live in Him and on Him, &c.; but where am I? In a body of sin and death,—in a world polluted and unhappy,—among the enemies of Christ and of my salvation,—surrounded with all that tends to quench the Divine life,—chills the living principle,—stunts its growth,—retards its progress. True, Christ is with me, or I should faint and perish; but I am among these evil influences, and far from home, in a land of strangers, often crying out, "All these things are against me." My portion here is Christ; but Christ and trial, Christ and sorrow, pain, affliction, temptation. And death will be to me gain.
- (b) *Because it will not only free me from all this, but place me personally where Christ is.* He will still be with me, and I with Him,—He will be still my life, nor more nor less,—but it will be life in Him, without all the painful adjuncts of this present life. Death will be gain to me, because it will unite me personally with that Christ on whom, in whom, and by whom I live here in spite of obstacles, and so unite me with Him as I cannot now conceive! Rest, glory, joy, eternal life, all in Him, "whom having not seen, yet I now love," &c." (1 Peter i. 8.)

Let all ponder these things! What would death be to you? "GAIN?" Not if you are unconverted,—not if you are unholy, worldly, out of Christ, without Him, separate from Him! Death to you will be loss,—loss of all things!—of life, of happiness, of wealth, of ease, and instead

thereof—PERDITION ! Into what dark, hopeless, hapless ruin does death drag thousands ! Oh, that ye would seek Christ and live ! In Him is life,—“ He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth on him ! ”—to crush, ruin, destroy !

—*Oh ! all ye that “ have life,” seek it “ more abundantly ; ” never rest satisfied until you can confidently look on death as certain gain to you ! Oh ! that you knew Christ better—lived nearer to Him—drew more out of Him ; for be assured, if you cannot say, “ to me to live is Christ,” neither can you say, “ to me to die is gain ; ” and if not gain, what is it ? Think of that !*

III.

CHRIST KNOCKS AT THE DOOR.

Revelation iii. 20. “ *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me !* ”

GRACIOUS invitations to sinners are multiplied in Holy Scripture, and presented under the most tender images. As a father receiving his prodigal son,—as a shepherd seeking and finding his sheep. In direct language—“ Come unto me, all ye,” &c. ; “ All day long stretches forth his hands ” (Proverbs i. 24) ; “ Ask and ye shall have,” &c. But perhaps the picture in the text surpasses all ! Here the Saviour stands a suppliant, knocking at the door of the reluctant sinner’s heart !

Let us contemplate the picture, and may it affect our consciences, by the help of the Holy Spirit !

I. BEHOLD THE WONDERFUL PICTURE !—“ Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.”

—*Who is this ? “ I stand ”—I, the glorified Jesus ! described chap. i. 10—20,—“ I am He that liveth and was dead,” &c. ; “ The King of kings, and Lord of lords.” He stands there knocking,—*

condescends to wait at the door, calling, inviting, endeavouring to gain an entrance into the sinner's heart. Waits long, and knocks loud, with great patience and love! How is this figure realized?

—*When you were a little child* your mother taught your knees to bend, lifted up your hands, and bid you pray to Jesus,—then he was knocking at the door of your infant heart! by Christian education, training, parents' prayers, &c.

—*By the ministry of the Word and Sacraments*, how long and loudly has Jesus knocked! Faithful warnings, invitations,—by holy sacraments—baptism, Holy Supper, Sabbaths, &c., all the means of grace.

—*By tender mercies innumerable!* Narrow escapes from disease and death, kind friends, adequate provision, temporal blessings.

—*By deep afflictions, trials, temptations.* Did you not hear his voice in the sick room, by the silent grave, in heaviness of heart, wasting of mind and body?—*A voice! a knock!*

—*By the secret struggles of conscience within you.* Has he not whispered in your ear continually? Have you not been convinced? Have you not resolved, vowed?

—*By these and many other ways does the Lord knock* at the door of the hearts of men—from their youth upwards!

II. OUR PICTURE SUGGESTS THAT MEN'S HEARTS ARE SHUT AGAINST THE SAVIOUR, NOTWITHSTANDING! Can this be so? can men neglect such a Saviour, thus asking admission? Yes, thousands do so. The picture is forcible,—here is an empty house, shut up, barred, bolted,—one stands without knocking,—no answer but dull echoes! or the house is lighted up and filled with noisy revellers, too much occupied to attend to Him who knocks; or it may be, misers are there, counting their gold, and have made the house secure,—they regard no visitor, his voice, or knockings, ever so loud! Such is the sinner's carnal heart! It is barred and bolted against the Lord Jesus Christ.

—*By unbelief. By prejudice. By love of the world.*

—*By ambition, pride, and vanity.* "How can ye believe who receive honour one of another?"

—*By the love of sin*, the lusts of the flesh, carnal and vicious delights; a heart defiled with these has no room for Christ! "Therefore lay aside all filthiness," &c. (James i. 21.)

These, or some of these, close the door in the Saviour's face. "Therefore they say unto God, depart from us," &c. (Job xxi. 14, and xxii. 17);

and the factory wheels fly round as before, and the markets flourish, and the giddy dance whirls on, "men eat and drink, and buy and sell, and marry and are given in marriage, till the flood comes," &c. (Matt. xxiv. 39.) "No man regardeth." (Proverbs i. 24.)—But some do! and hence our picture suggests—

III. THE UNSPEAKABLE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO OPEN THEIR HEARTS TO CHRIST! *

"If any man hear my voice." "If,"—it may be so—some, few it may be,—but "if any man hear my voice,"—they will not hear, listen, attend—the first thing is the hearing ear. If any man hear, it is because God has opened his ears, and so his heart, like *Lydia's*. "My voice,"—such a voice of love and mercy, so sweet, so gracious: and if hearing it, he attends, and is moved to rise up and "open the door," then the bolts and bars fly back—the welcome guest is received. "I will come unto him,"—I will not reproach him for keeping me waiting so long, but, in token of friendship, condescension, grace, "I will sup with him"—and of communion and fellowship—"and he with me!"

—Who can appreciate the blessings so conferred on the penitent, believing sinner! When cleansed from all its former guests, his heart, his house receives Jesus, and He dwells there!

—*Eating and drinking together* is the symbol through all Scripture of perfect reconciliation with God, and communion with Him. The elders in the Mount "saw God and did eat and drink." (Exodus xxiv. 10.) In patriarchal times, angelic visitants, the angel Jehovah himself visiting his people, "ate with them."

See—When Jesus received sinners He ate with them. (Luke xv. 24.)

—When He would memorialize his death for ever He instituted the Holy Communion.

—*Denoting condescension and love.* Not as Eastern monarchs, who ate apart; their subjects being only permitted to see them. We feed at his table.

—*Pardon and favour.* As the father who killed the fatted calf.

—*Communion and fellowship.* Drink out of the same cup; eat of the same bread. "All one in Christ Jesus,"—each united to Him, and so to each other,—one in Him.

—*Reception of effectual grace.* As food strengthens and refreshes the

* Paraphrase the text.

body, so Christ received, believed on, loved, and we united to Him in holy covenant, the soul is strengthened, refreshed, supported to the end.

1. *Has your heart received Jesus? or is it barred and bolted against Him?* Oh, contemplate the monstrous sin!—insult, contempt, indifference poured upon Christ himself! Oh; repent, listen, believe, turn, for “how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” (Hebrews ii. 3.)

2. *If you have heard, and opened your heart, and received Christ,* oh! cherish Him; seek his converse—nearer acquaintance; dread his departure and the sins which wound Him. Trust Him wholly, and He will never leave you!

IV.

INDECISION CONDEMNED.

Luke xi. 23. “*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*”

THESE are the words of the Prince of Peace! Yet was He the head of a great party and a man of strife,—“I came not to bring peace, but a sword.” A great contest in the world from the beginning; commenced in Paradise, by fall of man. The Lord himself declared the war,—“I will put enmity between thee and the woman,” &c. (Gen. iii. 15), and from that day the good and evil principle have contended. The former was impersonated when God became incarnate. Hence the great battle—Christ and the devil (v. 21, 22)—“Strong man armed,” &c. Hence the temptation. (Matt. iv. 11.) The life of Christ was a battle,—his death a victory,—his resurrection and ascension a triumph; but the battle on earth continues fiercely,—some are on the side of Christ, some are against Him, and some profess to be neutral! In the midst of this conflict we hear his words—may they sink into our hearts!—“He that is not with

me is against me ; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." Consider the three parties.

I. THOSE WHO ARE DECIDEDLY WITH HIM.

II. THOSE WHO OPENLY FIGHT AGAINST HIM.

III. THOSE WHO AFFECT TO BE NEUTRAL.

I. THERE ARE THOSE WHO ARE DECIDEDLY WITH CHRIST ; "they are with Him," and "they gather with Him."

(1) They are with Him ! Much implied in that word ; they are reconciled to God in Christ ; they are with Him in holy union, fellowship, membership ; they are one with Him—He dwells in them, and they in Him ; they walk with Him, live on Him and by Him ; they are with Him in much secret prayer, and holy converse, by means of his Word, ordinances, sacraments ; they are "brought nigh," and their motto is "nearer and nearer still !" Hence they must ever be with Him,—that is, on his side, in every conflict between light and darkness, sin and holiness, without flinching or indecision.

(2) "They gather with Him : " an important expression denoting Messiah's work, and his people under Him. (Genesis xlix. 10.) "To Him shall the gathering of the people be." (John xi. 52.) "To gather together in one the children of God," &c. (Eph. i. 10.) "That He might gather together in one, all things in Christ,"—"draw all men unto Him."

—Those therefore who are "*with Christ*" will always be engaged in gathering his people for Him out of this "naughty world ;" hence their zeal for his work and his glory ; hence their labours, toils, and prayers, to save souls, in all lands, far and near. Every one of Christ's true people must be known by this,—that he, in some way or other, actively promotes the extension of his kingdom.

II. THERE ARE OPEN ENEMIES OF CHRIST WHO FIGHT AGAINST HIM.

—*All sensualists and voluptuaries*,—"enemies of the cross of Christ." (Phil. iii. 18, 19.) The drunkard, the glutton, the fornicator, and adulterer,—"*enmity with God.*" (James iv. 4.) Slaves of carnal passions.

—*The covetous and worldly-minded*,—who are idolaters. (James v. 1—4.) "They that will be rich." (1 Timothy vi. 9, 10.) All the fraudulent, unjust, untrue,—all enemies of God !

—*Profane scoffers and blasphemers*. (1 John iii. 6, 8—10.) "Children

of the devil,"—speak his language, and do his work, who is "their Father." (John viii. 44.)

—*Sons and daughters of pleasure and worldliness*, who say unto God, "Depart from us," &c. "She who liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." "The friendship of the world is enmity with God."

—*Not less so are all sceptics, infidels, unbelievers*, and all who deny or corrupt the truth of God; all teachers of false doctrine, or who "hold the truth in unrighteousness;" all who deny the essential Godhead or real manhood of the Lord Jesus Christ. These and many others are his open enemies, and fight against Him in the world, under the headship of the devil, and they are "scattering" his people.

III. THERE ARE THOSE WHO PROFESS TO BE OF NO PARTY, AND THESE THE SAVIOUR SPECIALLY CONDEMNS.

- (1) Who are these? They are neither "for Christ," "nor against Him;" wise men after the flesh, who think they have found a *via media*, who look down on the battle of life as if only spectators—cautious, selfish; they don't commit themselves; they are not wicked, but they are not pious,—not vicious, but they are not virtuous,—hope they do no harm, but certainly do no good,—useless, idle, indolent, negative, cumberers of the ground. If they are ministers of Christ, "their trumpet gives an uncertain sound." If heads of families, nothing decided in their conduct, "double-minded," "unstable," afraid to confess Christ, and afraid to deny Him. Dead weight in society, sluggish, hinderers of all good! Like shifting ballast in a vessel.
- (2) *Our Lord once and for ever condemns all such.* "He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth!" Solemn words! awakening, arousing. He tolerates no neutrals; all who do not confess Him He will deny; every one who is useless He regards as mischievous; if he does not gather, he scatters; if he is not honestly, openly, decidedly on the side of Christ and godliness, he is on the Devil's side, and an enemy! "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." (Rev. iii. 16.) "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." (James iv. 17.)

—Let all solemnly and anxiously examine themselves. Here is the great battle of God Almighty! Christ and his people contend with the

Devil and his people ; the fight is fierce, continuous, to the end of time ! Some men are on this side,—others on that,—and some vainly think themselves neutrals ! Where do you stand ? where do I stand ? “ Who is on the Lord’s side, who ? ” *If you fight against God, woe be unto you. You must perish ! Oh repent,—renounce the Devil and all his works !*

If you hesitate, doubt, “halt between two opinions,” think to stand safely in indecision, you too will perish with the “unprofitable servant !” May the Lord show you your danger !

Faithful servants of Jesus, stand fast,—fear not,—courage, and the victory is yours.

V.

THE WORD OF GOD NOT VOID.

Isaiah lv. 10, 11. *“For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater : So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth : it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”*

GOD is wonderful in his works—in creation, in providence. The world is one great object-lesson to man. Not only so ; God in his revealed Word sends us to his works that we may trace his footsteps in the **VISIBLE** and **MATERIAL**, and so learn how He walks in the **INVISIBLE** and **SPIRITUAL** WORLD.

Here we have a special and instructive illustration drawn from natural phenomena,—may we by grace learn the lesson !

I. CONSIDER THE ILLUSTRATION.

II. The TRUTH ILLUSTRATED.

I. THE ILLUSTRATION,—“the rain and snow.”

1. Regard the phenomena themselves.

—*How wonderful!* The small drops of rain,—sometimes soft and gentle,—sometimes torrents; the white flakes of snow.

—*How beautiful!* When the sunlight plays upon them,—or, as in winter, when the sky is as though a mighty swarm of insects filled it.

—*How precarious and even capricious!* In temperate climates how fickle and uncertain,—rain and drought, showers, storms, and

—*Yet how constant!* Never fail! 6,000 years roll by, still the snow and rain never forget to fall in their season.

2. The apparent waste of rain and snow.

To the uninstructed perplexing! How much falls on the barren ocean,—how much on the desert wastes, destitute of vegetation,—how much on trackless and perpetual mountains of snow. Sometimes, too, there is mischief and destruction in their path,—the devastating flood, the overwhelming avalanche, &c.

3. Yet all these are beneficial to man.

Not a drop of rain or flake of snow wasted! Those snowy mountains are the reservoirs of rivers,—that vast expanse of ocean and all the rain and snow it receives are only just enough to give back in evaporation, and supply the clouds, which supply the hills and their fountains! They only water the earth, and make it bud and yield seed and bread for man.

4. And most chiefly—all these obey the eternal laws of their Creator; they do but accomplish what He pleases!

They obey the great master mind, and fulfil his purpose. They do not return to Him void,—they cannot fail, for “He maketh the clouds his chariot, and rideth upon the wings of the wind.”

II. SEE THE TRUTH ILLUSTRATED. “So shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth,” &c. “The snow and the rain” are “God’s word,” his revelation, his written Word, his preached Word, his truth.

1. Consider his Word.

—*How wonderful!* Its prophecies, its promises, its spirituality, its adaptation to man, its histories, its precepts!

—*How beautiful!* What books can equal its sublimity, its pathos, its imagery, its narratives? Salvation in it and through it,—God in Christ discovered!

—*How precarious!* This heavenly rain falls not in all lands,—some more highly favoured, others distant and barren,—more uncertain than the showers!

—*Yet constant.* It has never failed the earth. "His covenant remains." There are always peoples, and nations, and churches, which are his,—spiritual seed time, and harvest fail not.

2. Yet much of this Word appears to fail, and to return void !

Not a few of his labourers seem to spend their strength for nought. His written Word,—how little is it read ! His preached Word,—how much is it trampled under foot ! What a vast amount of Christian education, instruction, knowledge, seems to be utterly lost.

3. Yet a great work is done notwithstanding.

This Word is not lost. It may be hidden ; it may disappear like the rain, or the melting snow in the earth, or on the sea, but it springs up again ! Many a seemingly barren region shall be found fruitful ! The effect of this Word cannot be known now ! Hereafter pastors, teachers, parents shall be astonished by the fruits of their prayers, tears, labours, when godless children shall meet their pious parents in heaven.

4. But this is certain.

All shall be according to the eternal and unchangeable purpose of God. "It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it !" Here is the repose of faith,—here is the calm support of duty ! All must be as He wills, as He pleases, and therefore must be right. Whether his Word be a message of "death unto death, or of life unto life" (2 Cor. ii. 14—16), his will be done ! Whether "by hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand," or "blessed are your eyes, for they see ; and your ears, for they hear" (Matthew xiii. 12—15), it is of God—the just, and good, and merciful ; his "Word shall not return void !"

—*What a solemn thing it is to possess, to hear, to read the Word of God !* There is life and death in it—eternal.

—*What weighty responsibility rests on those who teach, expound, and apply it !* "To be found faithful." "Rightly dividing the Word of truth." "Keeping nothing back." "Declaring the whole counsel of God."

—*How should all examine themselves as to the effect which this Word has*

had on them! "Are we barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ?"

—How should the united prayers of the Church of God ascend for the rain, and snow, and dew of that Holy Spirit, by which alone the soul can be fertilized!

VI.

DIVINE WORSHIP.

John iv. 21—24. "*Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship, ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*"

THESE words comprise a complete subject; and it is not necessary to consider the entire narrative connected with them in order to gather their true meaning. May the Holy Spirit bless our meditations! Jesus is trying to make the woman of Samaria understand the true nature of Divine worship under the Gospel dispensation, and in the words before us, shows—

I. THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP.

II. THE NATURE OF WORSHIP.

III. THE PLACE OF WORSHIP.

I. It is of the utmost importance that we should know what we worship, lest we become idolaters, and worship a God of our own creation, and not the true God. "Ye know not what ye worship," said our Lord, and so he might say to many who profess and call themselves Christians. He teaches us—

- (1) That God is A SPIRIT (v. 24). Simple but sublime words. God is a spiritual being—a person, an intelligent person—to whose nature

the spirit, mind, thought, of intellectual man approaches. He is not a mere influence, or principle, or power—nor hath He body, or parts, or material existence—but is God, a SPIRIT.

- (2) He is a SAVIOUR—the God of salvation—and has discovered himself as one who redeems, atones, saves. Unless we discern this character we know Him not! The argument of our Lord is remarkable. “Ye worship ye know not what,” said He to this woman; “and we know what we worship,”—and how do we know it? and what is the difference between us? “Because salvation is of the Jews.” There is no true God where there is no salvation, and the only true God was the God of the Jews, because salvation appeared among them,—“God manifest in the flesh.” “He had made a covenant with them by sacrifice.”
- (3) The object of our worship is also “OUR FATHER.” This is his new-covenant title. Three times in the text does Jesus call Him Father, and in many other places. “The Father himself loveth you.” “Enter into thy closet and pray to thy Father.” And He bids all his children say, “Our Father!” When He was leaving his disciples he said, “I ascend up to my Father and your Father.” Language continued by the apostles. He is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and therefore “the Father of mercies!” “He has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts crying, Abba, Father.” We do not know God, until we know Him as our Father. Thus are we taught of the object of our worship. He is A SPIRIT—He is A SAVIOUR—He is our FATHER!

II. AS TO THE NATURE OF OUR WORSHIP. This suggested by the object of our worship.

- (1) Is he a SAVIOUR? Then we should come to Him as sinners; for sinners only need a SAVIOUR! All others will be rejected. If you do not need a Saviour, you do not need the true God, and can neither know nor worship Him. All have sinned and come short of his glory; all are guilty, some more so, some less, but all are guilty; and not a son of Adam can approach a holy God, except as a sinner condemned, guilty, cursed, seeking salvation and mercy, and pardon and grace from a Saviour! There can be no acceptable worship until we are convinced of sin, and humbled on account of it.
- (2) Is God a FATHER? Then we should worship Him as children. Reconciled to Him as a Saviour, pardoned, accepted, justified, there is no more condemnation for us who believe, and so we can look up to the great God and call Him Father! (Rom. viii. 14—17; Gal. iv. 6, 7.) And St. John says,—“Beloved, now are we the sons of God!” (1 John iii. 1, 2.)

- (3) Is He a SPIRIT? Then "we must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Whether as a Saviour, a Father, or the great God, He will accept only the worship of the mind, the heart, the understanding. An idol god might be satisfied with the bended knee and uplifted hand, but our God looks on the heart! "My son, give me thine heart!" A legal master would be content with outward obedience, but our God requires his law to be written in our hearts, because he is a Spirit. And He has promised his Holy Spirit to enable us to do so.

III. AS TO THE PLACE OF WORSHIP.

- (1) It was formerly, and for hundreds of years, only in one place where God would be worshipped. Deuteronomy xii. 5: "Unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose," &c.; and v. 13, 14: "Not in every place." So also Exodus xxv. 21, 22: "THERE I will meet thee." "Salvation was then confined to the Jews," and where the Ark of the Covenant, and the High Priest, and the altar, and all the symbols of salvation were,—there, and there only, would God be worshipped. Thither "the tribes of the Lord went up," and when banished from that place they worshipped "*towards it*." So Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple. (1 Kings viii. 35—38, 42.) So Daniel in captivity in Babylon, threw open his window and "prayed towards Jerusalem." (Daniel vi. 10.) "I will worship toward thy holy temple!" There the Great God actually dwelt in the Holy of holies, and there only would He be worshipped.
- (2) But our Lord teaches the woman of Samaria that this whole system of local worship was passing away. "The hour was coming,"—nay, "was come,"—when the mountain of Samaria would be as holy as Mount Zion,—the Steppes of Russia and the Prairies of America as sacred as the land of Canaan,—when neither in one place more than in another would God be worshipped, but anywhere and everywhere—"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst." (Matthew xviii. 20.) That is my church, my temple, my holy mountain, in the midst of the hearts of my praying people. "To all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor. i. 2.)

—*Do you pray?* If no prayer, no God! no Christ, no salvation, no heaven! To be prayerless is to be godless: prayer is the hidden life of God in the soul, and where there is no prayer there is spiritual death!

—*If you pray, how do you pray?* Do you come to God as a sinner,

seeking salvation? As a child—loving, dependant, believing—to a Father? As a spiritual, intelligent being to Him who is a Spirit?—*Oh ye who know what prayer is—cultivate it; “pray without ceasing;” “continue instant in prayer;” “pray in the Spirit;” “He will help your infirmities.”* And ever set before you the loving, generous, tender character of that great Spirit who is at once your Saviour and your Father, and so come in love, casting out fear.

VII.

ST. PAUL, A PATTERN.

1 Timothy i. 16. “*Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.*”

IF St. Paul’s conversion, which was in so many respects peculiar, is here declared to be a PATTERN of conversion, it must be equally true that other conversions recorded in Holy Scripture must be intended as patterns also. It cannot but be instructive to classify and examine them. Let us then, seeking help from on high, consider—

I. THE VAST VARIETY OF PERSONS ON WHOM THE MIRACLE OF GRACE WAS WROUGHT.

II. THE PECULIARITIES OF THEIR CONVERSION.

I. MEN AND WOMEN WERE CONVERTED TO CHRIST OUT OF EVERY CLASS OF SOCIETY, AND OF EVERY SHADE OF MORAL CHARACTER.

1. *Now a learned Rabbi*, as Nicodemus, coming by night to Jesus, or a moral and religious Nathanael.

—Then a *publican*—notorious oppressors; dishonest, extortioners. *Among the women of Israel*: what contrasts. *Here* are two modest, amiable, domestic young persons,—Martha and Mary. *There* a shameless woman, a notorious sinner. *Now* a woman taken in adultery, *then* a stranger, a Syrophenician woman, or the woman of Samaria, living in a state of sin. In one case a bigoted, intolerant, persecuting Saul of Tarsus; in another an inquiring, humble, pious

Roman centurion. Or contrast the diligent and conscientious Jewess, who in a foreign land, seeks on the Sabbath-day a quiet oratory by the river-side ; and that rude, cruel, savage jailor, who, in the same city, was converted to God. Does it not seem that the Scripture "PATTERNS" indicate that the power of Divine grace should be exhibited in men and women of all ranks, classes, professions, and characters ?

2. May we not bless God that these "PATTERNS" are still imitated in the present day both at home and abroad ?

(a) *Examples of the power of Divine grace may be shown among all classes of our countrymen.* While, alas, the great body of which society is composed are still, for the most part, unconverted, some from each stand out in bold relief. We have NOBLES who are not gamblers, horse-racers, profligate,—who spend their time and money in promoting God's glory and the happiness and salvation of men. We have godly centurions—officers in the army and navy—merchant princes, who dedicate their profits to God ; professional men, tradesmen, and many humble poor. Some who have been abandoned and godless ; some who have always been moral and correct ; persons of every shade of virtue and vice, who are "*patterns*" of true conversion to God. Would that there were more !

(b) *Abroad in heathen lands :* civilized and savage, negroes, Indians, Chinamen, &c.

II. THE PECULIARITIES OF THEIR CONVERSION : remembering that they are "patterns to them which should hereafter believe in Christ unto life everlasting."

1. In Scripture story, the mode of each person's conversion to God will be found to have its own peculiarities.

—CONVERSION is, and always must be, CONVERSION, nor more nor less—the entire change and renewal of heart for God ; but the mode, the symptoms, the evidences of it, will differ widely. God does not deal with all alike.

—*See Nicodemus seeking Jesus :* by night, timid, slow, he did not confess Him for three years ! Yet how graciously Jesus meets his prejudices, leads him on, &c.

—*Or Nathanael*—the honest Israelite. (John i. 46—49.)

—*The curious publican in the sycamore tree.*

—*How different the dying thief !* "Lord, remember me," &c.

—*To brokenhearted penitent, sinful women,* pardon and peace immediately administered.

—*Kind Jews at the grave of Lazarus.* (John xi. 45.)

—*The patient and unwearyed instruction of the woman of Samaria.*

—*Or in after times :* the Ethiopian eunuch calmly reading Isaiah ; a messenger is miraculously sent to instruct him.

—*To the pious centurion*—Peter sent “ to tell him words whereby he could be saved.” Timothy inherits the piety of three generations, and is gradually led to Christ by education : while nothing less than a light from heaven will convert the persecuting Saul ; and an earthquake, the rude jailor at Philippi.

—Some are led gently, some driven fiercely, some inquire long, slowly overcome prejudices, gradually receive light, while others are illumined in a moment ! But there is an appropriateness in each mode to the peculiarities of each person.

2. And so it is still.

There cannot be a greater mistake than to suppose that every one must pass through the same feelings, sensations, experiences, in truly turning to God : these are “ PATTERNS ” mercifully recorded for our comfort. The Lydias, Marthas, and Marys, are not to be classed with the shameless women, nor expected to pass through the same agonies of mind as those penitents. One man is slow, another quick, of apprehension ; one is of strong passions, another cool and calculating ; one is of moral life, another profligate : each has his own peculiar character, and God has his own peculiar way of bringing each to himself :—some He drives by terrors, others He draws by love ; some He wins by the force of reason, others by their affections. As of plants and trees, some are quick of growth, others slow in coming to maturity.

LEARN : 1. *That every one born into the world is born in sin, and must be born again :* and that whether before, in, or after the water-baptism, there must be a renewal, change, conversion of heart to God.

2. *That the mode of this change varies with the individual :* and that God deals graciously with all.

3. *Let all yield up their hearts through his appointed means of grace, to be fashioned for his glory.*

VIII.

BELIEVERS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

Matthew v. 14—16. “*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*”

THE figures and illustrations of our Lord are distinguished by extreme simplicity. They are borrowed from things familiar, in order to explain things less plain,—deep mysteries by homely examples. Thus in the previous verse he compares his people to salt. Its properties are known to all. What salt is to meat, Christians are to a sinful world. So here, with equal plainness but more beauty, “they are the light of the world.”

May we through grace learn from this metaphor—

I. THE HIGH CHARACTER WHICH CHRIST ATTRIBUTES TO HIS PEOPLE,—“they are the light of the world.”

II. THE CONDUCT HE EXPECTS FROM THEM,—“that they should shine.”

I. We must inquire—

1. To whom these words were addressed:—

To his *disciples*, though in the presence of the multitude. And the moral qualities and conditions of his disciples He had defined: “they were the poor in spirit,”—“those that mourn,”—“the meek,”—“those who hunger and thirst after righteousness,”—“the merciful,”—“the pure in heart,”—“the persecuted,” &c. To them He said it; not to the talented, the philosophers, the great men, but to his poor disciples,—his fishermen, and those who should believe through them. “Ye are the light of the world.”

2. How can this be?

Is not Christ the light of the world? Undoubtedly. “This is the true Light,” &c. (John i. 6—9.) “I am come a light into the

world," &c. (John xii. 35, 36, 46.) As *Simeon* beheld Him,—“a light to lighten the Gentiles.” “Awake thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light.” All in Him and from Him.

3. Yet his people are the light of the world.

Dark in themselves, they are “light in the Lord ;” opaque, like the moon, they shine in the borrowed light of the sun. They are the mirror in which men should see the image of God. “God hath shined into our hearts to give the light,” &c. (2 Cor. iv. 6.) So of John Baptist,—“Though not that light,” but sent only “to bear witness of it ;” yet Jesus calls him “a burning and shining light.” “Ye were darkness, now light in the Lord.” (Eph. v. 8.) “Shine as lights in the world.” (Phil. ii. 15, 16.) Light-bearers for God in a dark world !

4. Different degrees of light in them.

Some “*like a city set on an hill*,”—conspicuous—public—gifted—high position—station—shine brightly, strongly, widely. Others, *like “a candle” in cottage*,—humble sphere—limited usefulness. But all derive light from Christ ; equally shine by Him and for Him. As the glow-worm and the sun in the firmament, the gas-light and the candle,—all, all light in Him ; so all alike promote his glory.

II. THE CONDUCT WHICH HE EXPECTS FROM THEM,—“that they should shine,” &c. (Ver. 16.) (*Paraphrase it.*)

—“*Let YOUR light.*” All have a light—some light, some grace, some knowledge,—gifts, education, means, time, health, property,—that is “*your light*,”—not his, nor theirs, nor mine, but yours. It may be more or less, but it is *yours*,—what God hath given you.

—“*Let your light shine*,”—bright, clear, steady. Cherish it ; watch over it ; feed it with prayer ; meditate on the Word of God, &c. Don’t “quench the Spirit.”

—“*Let it shine before men.*” Don’t be ashamed of it ; don’t “put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all in the house.” Be not ostentatious, but let not false modesty make you conceal your light. “I have not *hid* my righteousness within my heart. I have declared it,” &c. (Psalm xl. 10.)

—“*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works.*” “Our light must so shine before men.” They cannot see our faith, our love, our prayers, our penitence, our conflicts ; but they can see the fruits of them,—“*our good works.*” Men of the world cannot understand Gospel principles or experience ; but they

can understand honesty, purity, virtue, love, goodness, charity, generosity, &c. "Whatsoever things are true," &c. (Phil. iv. 8.) — "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may glorify,*" not you, but "*your Father who is in heaven.*" That men may not say, "Oh, what a good man ; how amiable," &c., and praise you ; but that they may see and own the finger of God, and say, "This hath God wrought ;" and so give the glory to Him for all that is good in his people.

Learn in conclusion,—

1. *That the source of all holy living, and of all good works, is the light and life of Christ within.* There can be no holy living before the principle of holy life in the heart. We read of "dead works,"—moral duties done upon carnal principles ; but nothing good can be in us until the light of Christ is in us.

2. *That the light and life within must be tested by the holy works without.* If our light does not shine in good works before men, "the light which is in us is darkness." Sentiment, feeling, passion, and strong religious emotions are all delusive, if they are "barren and unfruitful." Oh, let us pray for more light, life, peace, grace within, which may abound in holiness, and be rich in good works without !

IX.

GOD'S PRESENCE AND GOD'S REST.

Exodus xxxiii. 14, 15. "*And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.*"

THIS promise of God and this plaintive appeal of Moses had special import at that time. Israel had been marvellously delivered, and Israel had most fearfully sinned at the foot of Sinai. The story is familiar :—The forty days in the Mount ; the idolatry, vice, &c., of the people ; God's anger and Moses' wrath ; the tables broken ; the slaughter ; the

plague; God withdrawn from the camp (ver. 3, 5, 7, &c.); the tabernacle removed, &c. Now Moses pleads,—advocate with God,—“day’s-man,”—implores forgiveness and reconciliation. (*Text*), “My presence shall go,” &c. May that Divine presence be with us while we consider,—

I. THE NATURE OF THIS PROMISE.

II. THE IMPORTANCE WHICH MOSES ATTACHED TO IT.

I. THE PROMISE WAS TWOFOLD. 1. God’s presence. 2. God’s rest.

1. “My presence shall go with thee.”

This boon of God’s people is the terror of the wicked. God’s presence is to them only terrible; they would flee from it—escape it—hide from it, as fallen Adam in the trees of the garden.

—But to those who know and love God, his sensible presence and nearness to them is their chief blessing, and has been so in all ages. “With favour wilt thou compass him,” &c. (Psalm v. 11, 12.) “Fear not; I am with thee,” &c. (Isaiah xli. 10.) “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee,” &c. (xliii. 1—3). “Lo, I am with you alway,” &c. (Matt. xxviii. 20.) Amidst his foes, and when deserted by friends, “the Lord stood with Paul,” &c.

—To strengthen, cheer, support, guide, comfort, uphold, “a very present help in trouble :” anywhere and always.

2. “And I will give thee rest.” This also twofold.

(a) *Present rest in God* : enjoyment of his favour—assurance of his love—sweet repose, calm, tranquillity—all in Him, dwelling in Him, loving Him, delighting in Him. “When he giveth quietness, who then can give trouble? &c.” (Job xxxiv. 29.) “There remaineth,” there abideth, now, “a rest for the people of God” (Hebrews iv. 9.) “We which have believed do enter into rest” (v. 3).

(b) *It is the final, future rest* : the sweetest of all—rest in sleep, the sleep of the grave, the pillow of faith—“we sleep in Jesus.” “They rest from their labours,” and the living soul is with Jesus,—“to depart and be with Christ, is far better.” Yet not complete—not until the sleepers awake, and enter with glory into the joy of their Lord, and “their rest shall be glorious.”

II. THE IMPORTANCE WHICH MOSES ATTACHED TO THIS PROMISE.

"If thy presence go not with us carry us not up thence," that is, let us perish here, cut us off at once, better die than stir a step without thee !—

1. This was the result of experience in Moses,—

—He had tasted the sweets of this mercy in times past—for eighty years he had leaned on that arm, and it had not failed him :—he thought of his cradle of bulrushes—of the wrath of Pharaoh—of his flight in the desert—of more recent deliverance of him and his people—and so he prayed, "If thy presence go not," &c.

—*He looked around him*—the raging multitude, the rebellious people, the desert, his helplessness, and he embraced the promise.

—*He looked onward, forward*—the difficulties of the way—the unmanageable people—the numerous enemies—and but for the Lord's presence, he despaired.

2. Are not these promises equally valuable to us ?

—*We look back over the past*—what else but God's presence has upheld, delivered, sustained, &c. "By the help of God we continue unto this day,"—much to tell of his goodness, love, faithfulness. "If the Lord had not been on our side, &c.,"—again and again, on a bed of sickness, in sorrow, pain, trouble, He was with us.

And for the future ! Not an hour, not a moment before us do we know,—what of joy or of sorrow, what of prosperity or adversity—unknown, untried, future—how face it without Him ? What can cheer, support, comfort, tranquillize—what allay anxiety, anticipation of evil, but this ?—"My presence shall go with thee !"

—*How safe, happy, are they who have the Lord with them always.* "Joseph was a prosperous man, because the Lord was with him." (Genesis xxxix. 2, &c.) So David and all others. None can harm them, all things work for their good.

—*But how of them who have Him not ?* What peace of mind can they have ? what security ? what light in a dark world ? Without chart, compass, or star, how can they steer over the troubled ocean of life ? And in death, what then ? No hope—cheerless despondency !

—*Let all acquaint themselves with God that they may be at peace :—seek his face—*"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is gracious." Ask of Him

and He will teach, guide, lead your soul "into his love" (2 Thess. iii. 5), then shall you be safe and happy, now in this world, and in that which is to come.

X.

LOT'S WIFE.

Luke xvii. 32. "*Remember Lot's wife!*"

A HEART-STIRRING narrative. The wickedness of Sodom, the intercession of Abraham, the visit of angels, the mission of Lot rejected by his sons-in-law, the hesitation of Lot, the angel hastening them, the narrow escape, the overthrow and final catastrophe!

—It is past; the curious neighbours draw near cautiously—convulsed nature reposes—a stagnant fetid lake—a shore of cinders and ashes—where had been "the garden of the Lord!" But what is this? A solitary pillar! a lonely monument erected by no human hand! It is a woman's form—a pillar of salt—it is Lot's wife! She looked back, disobeying the word of the Lord, and perished: and the inscription is—"REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE."

—May it please God to bless our recollection of this melancholy event to our soul's salvation! Consider—

I. THE CASE OF LOT'S WIFE.

II. WHEREFORE WE SHOULD REMEMBER IT.

I. 1. See her condition and circumstances.

Whether a Jewess or a Canaanite, she was the Patriarch's wife—united to the family of God. She lay in the bosom of "JUST LOT." She lived uncorrupt in Sodom—was the head of a godly household—was the object of Abraham's prayers; entertained angels—felt the angelic hand—escaped—was beyond the reach of danger—a few more steps and she had been in Zoar! but she looked back; and for that one look she miserably perished! and became a monument of God's wrath!

2. Consider the heinousness of her sin : it seems little to man ! What, only just to look once and perish ! Hard judgment !

- (a) *It was wilful disobedience.* She had heard the Divine command—"flee for thy life—look not behind thee." But she would look, and did look, and so committed the sin of Adam—*disobedience* ! She rebelled and died—it was a great occasion—had she escaped, the men of Sodom had been unjustly dealt with.
- (b) *Her sin was unbelief.* Did she not doubt the angel's word ? or think to see whether it were true ? Had she believed it, would she have dared to look back ? Had she believed, she would have obeyed !
- (c) *Her sin was the love of what she had left behind !* It was all doomed, and she knew it—property, children, family, all cursed, devoted to destruction—and her life only was left—but her heart yearned after the world—she loved the doomed city, and so judgment overtook her like unto its judgment.

3. See her deplorable end :—

Calamitous, awful, exemplary ! In a moment, her eye could but have caught a glimpse of the smoke of that great furnace when it was glazed in death ! She did not even fall—no scream, nor sound ; silent, certain, marvellous transformation—"she became a pillar of salt." Let science inquire, if it will, as to this petrefaction—this formation. We will not repeat her sin by doubting it. Tradition reports its existence for ages ; but, enough for us, the sacred story leaves her there, a warning to future generations !

II. WHEREFORE SHOULD WE REMEMBER HER ?—They are our Saviour's words—"REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE !"

1. The lessons she teaches to all.

- (a) *The nature of sin :* it is *disobedience*, the transgression of the law. Men take a wrong estimate of its guilt ; they consider some things venial, others criminal, but the nature of the command matters not. As of Adam, had it been the Koh-i-noor diamond which he took instead of an apple, it would have been no greater sin—it was forbidden, yet he did it, and that is sin !
- (b) *The origin of sin :*—of all sin, and without which sin cannot be, *unbelief*. Had Adam, or Lot's wife, or any other sinner, believed, they would have obeyed—faith is the origin of all obedience—unbelief, of all sin. If men believe in heaven, they will seek it ; if in hell, they will flee from it, &c. They do not believe, therefore do not seek nor flee.

- c) *The sure connexion between sin and death!* Not always so obvious, so immediate; long intervals may intervene, sin may be forgotten, but it pursues the sinner, dodges his steps, and seizes him at last. "Be sure your sin will find you out." It is cause and effect—time affects it not—900 years elapsed between Adam's sin and Adam's death—but it came at last.

2. She speaks, though dead, more especially to persons bearing a religious character.

- (a) *See how intimately we may be connected with religious people—* friends, acquaintances, social circle,—united to godly for years, *and yet be eternally separated!* Fearfully common! If there be not personal piety, individual faith, love, and holiness,—if the heart be not given to God, we may associate with believers, speak their language, adopt their habits, frequent their worship,—*and perish after all!*
- (b) *See again that we may leave the cities of destruction,*—set out on the heavenly journey,—walk far towards it,—almost see its gates, *and yet fall short of it!* Deny that any of God's elect shall perish! But who are they? "Those who endure to the end, and are saved,"—who persevere, and fight, and conquer. The result alone can declare it! Many, very many, like Lot's wife, or like Israel in the wilderness; they appear to set out and travel well, but in time of temptation fall away.
- (c) *How imminently perilous, even to look back!* Not all who look back perish,—in this Lot's wife was sadly peculiar. But in all cases perilous! We look back, we turn, we love, we sink, perish! Who knows that he may not perish? Awful warnings,—Luke ix. 62,—*"Put hand to the plough,"* &c.; 2 Pet. ii. 18—22,—*"entangled again;"* Hebrews vi. 4, &c.

Should not all true believers remember Lot's wife? Watchfulness, circumspection, humility, prayer! "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed," &c. (1 Cor. x. 12.) "See then that ye walk circumspectly." (Ephes. v. 15.) "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." (Matt. xxvi. 41.) And then "commit the keeping of your soul to God," &c. (1 Peter iv. 19.) "Kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation," &c. (1 Peter i. 5.)

XI.

GROWTH AN EVIDENCE OF LIFE.

1 Peter ii. 2. "*As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.*"

THE Apostle here refers to a figure which he had used in the previous chapter. (v. 23.) He had there described the great change of heart, or conversion, as the new birth—"being born again;" and he had taught that the great means by which this new birth was effected was the Word, the preached Word, "the Gospel." "This is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you." And here in the text he shows that that which was the means of life was the means of growth,—“being born again by the Word,”—being now alive, nourish that life, and promote its growth, by the same means—the Word, “as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.”

May the Holy Spirit open our hearts to receive the truths thus revealed to us, while we consider—

I. THAT GROWTH IS THE EVIDENCE OF LIFE.

II. THAT THE NOURISHMENT WHICH PROMOTES SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS THE WORD OF GOD.

I. HERE IS AN IMPORTANT EVIDENCE OF LIFE—GROWTH !

1. This is a great law of nature *in the inanimate world.*

—Where there is life there is growth, and everything that lives grows. Thus, at the beginning, “the Lord God made every tree to grow” (Genesis ii. 9), and from that day forward, through all time, all inanimate nature grows. The growth of some is quick and short, “the flower of the grass,”—of others, slow as the stately oak, but all grow; when cease to grow, begin to decay, and death quickly follows.

—*So in the animate world*, in all its immense varieties, from the mighty geological Saurians, monsters of deep and land, to the smallest insect of air or worm of earth, there is birth, life, and, as a necessary consequence, *growth*. An undeviating law of nature !

—*So physical man himself.* He is born,—he lives; from that

moment he begins to grow. Infant—babe—child—boy—youth—man! Measure the strength of his inner life by his growth. Stunted? dwarf? The parents are unhappy,—there must be disease, decay, apprehension of death, if no growth.

2. Thus nature echoes the voice of God! Natural and spiritual life are in this respect identical. Growth is the normal state of life.

(a) *All the illustrations of Scripture teach this lesson.* Proverbs iv. 18—"Path of the just . . . shineth more and more, &c." Mark iv. 26—29—"First the blade, then the ear," &c. 1 John ii, throughout—"Little children, young men, fathers in Christ." "They go from strength to strength," &c. So in the text, young Christians are "*new born babes*." Every figure implies growth, progress.

(b) *So the direct teaching of Scripture.* 2 Peter iii. 18—"Grow in grace." Eph. iv. 15—"Grow up into Him," &c. 1 Thess. iv. 1—"more and more." 2 Thess. i. 3—"Your faith groweth exceedingly." Philip. i. 9—"Love may abound more and more."—The voice of Scripture is uniform. Where spiritual life exists it will progress, increase, strengthen, deepen; it must grow, and if there is no growth there is no life!

—*Pause here and inquire, does my religion bear this mark of genuineness?* Does grace in me grow? Do I see any progress in Divine things? Any increase of love, faith, penitence, tenderness of heart, hatred of sin, separation from the world, cultivation of holiness?

—*Wanting this evidence, there is deep cause of alarm,* of self-examination, humiliation, searching of heart, and prayer.

II. THE NOURISHMENT BY WHICH THIS GROWTH IS TO BE PROMOTED.
 "The sincere milk of the Word,"—that is, appropriate nourishment,—
 "milk for babes, and meat for strong men."

1. Here again the spiritual nourishment is illustrated by the laws of nature.

—*Inanimate world.* Its innumerable varieties—"from the hyssop on the wall to the cedar of Lebanon,"—each and all are fed by their proper and peculiar aliment. It is a study, a science of itself,—the soil, the aspect, the atmosphere, the temperature, earth, air, sea, skies—all contribute to the growth of each flower, and weed, and tree, and plant, "that it may grow thereby."

—*Animated nature*—more wonderfully! Each creature has its

peculiar food, suited to its organs of digestion. Birds, and beasts, and fishes, and creeping things—all their proper nourishment that they may grow.

—*So physical man himself.* New born babe,—what *care, food, warmth, air, exercise, nutriment*—all that he may grow !

2. Exactly so of the spiritual man.

—“He is born again,”—he is “created anew in Christ Jesus,”—“he lives,”—“he has passed from death unto life, and shall never die.” *But the living soul must be fed,* and its food is

- (a) *The Word of God*,—that is, the revelation of God, the Holy Scriptures, the written Word, or, as here more especially, the *preached Word* (chap. i. 23—25),—“the Gospel.” The same *Word*, as he had spoken of before. That which quickens—nourishes ; that which gives life—sustains it,—containing suitable food for every age and all experiences. (2 Tim. iii. 15—17.)
- (b) *The proper object of this Word is to promote the growth of the spiritual or inner man.* “Nourished in word and doctrine.” Its promises to animate ; its threatenings and warnings to arouse ; its predictions to awaken faith. Here is every soil, every atmosphere, every sort of food, suited to all the peculiarities of life in God’s people.
- (c) *There is an instinctive desire for this food where there is life.* “Desire ye, or ye desire the sincere milk,” &c. The still-born babe cries not for the breast, because there is no life ; but the living babe thirsts and cries for the food of nature, because it is alive and hungry, and desires to grow. Thus every truly converted man desires, longs for, thirsts after God’s Word.

Here, then, is another test of character and evidence of conversion. As growth is an evidence of life, so a desire of the food and nourishment which promotes growth is another evidence. Men in general, unconverted men, have no desire for God’s Word, written or preached. They look on the Bible as a good book, and a sermon as a proper sort of thing to be read or heard ; but as to thirsting, desiring, or longing for God’s Word as the life and nourishment of their souls, they despise the idea. Such are *ipso facto* proved to be unconverted ! If born again they would desire ; they have no desire, thirst, wish for God’s Word ! Therefore they are not born again. They must be so, or they are lost.

—Judge yourselves—examine—try ; be not deceived.

—*Having this thirst, desire, and pleasure in hearing and reading God's Word, see to it that ye be doers of it also.* Itching ears, love of novelty, pleasurable excitement, may create a taste for mere hearing; but do “you grow thereby?”—grow better, holier, more virtuous, devoted, charitable, loving? Oh! “to be hearers only, deceiving ourselves.”

—*The vast reciprocal responsibilities of preachers and hearers.*

XII.

IMPOSSIBLE WITH MAN, POSSIBLE WITH GOD.

Mark x. 26, 27. “*And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.*”

RELIGIOUS and benevolent persons are often staggered by the obstacles which oppose themselves to all philanthropic undertakings: even the ordinary difficulties encountered in the salvation of a single individual surprise them. So the disciples here were “astonished out of measure” at the rich man’s difficulties: “it was easier for a camel,” &c.; “who then can be saved!” Jesus taught them that it was not only difficult, but impossible for man alone; “but with God all things are possible.”

Let us then consider—

I. MAN’S IMPOSSIBILITIES.

II. GOD’S ALL-SUFFICIENCY.

I. MAN’S IMPOTENCY MAY BE VIEWED—

1. Generally; as shown in great public efforts to do good on a large scale.

(a) *Regard the education of the young.* Schools are multiplied; excellent teachers appointed; the machinery is perfect; the system all that can be desired; discipline, training, teaching—moral, physical,

spiritual,—all admirable ; but can success be ensured ? Can the hearts of the children be changed ? Can all, or even a majority, be exhibited as success ? Alas ! parents, teachers, educators of all sorts, know by experience “ that with man it is impossible.”

(b) *Try to reclaim the abandoned ones, male and female, of the home population.* Plunge into the dens of infamy ; reform the drunkard ; reclaim the prostitute ; persuade the thieves to be honest ; arrest the course of fraud, deception, and wrong. Alas ! how soon man’s impossibilities appear ; how little we can do ! what disappointments check our zeal ! We exclaim, “ Who is sufficient for these things ? ”

(c) *Or, extend your efforts to Pagan lands.* Prosecute your mission of love among the heathen, or the Mussulmen ; persuade them to forsake their idols and serve the true God ; detach them from their cruel and barbarous practices. “ With man it is impossible,” is echoed back from many lands.

2. Or, see the same principle, man’s moral impotency, exhibited in individual cases, as in this passage :—

—*Ask the rich man to sell all and follow Christ :* “ He goes away sorrowful, for he has great possessions.”

—*Reason with the sceptic, the Rationalist, the infidel :* he smiles at your innocent superstition and amiable weakness.

—*Try to turn any sinner, of any character, from the error of his ways, and you discover that* “ the old Adam is too strong for the young Melancthon,” however zealous he be. How many ministers and pious men are tempted to withhold their hands, to slack their labours, by reason of sad discouragement. God is only teaching them “ that with man it is impossible.”

—*It is well if we do not painfully learn the same lesson* in the sad experience of our own hearts, by lingering corruptions, evil tempers, passions, not only hard, but “ impossible ” to conquer.

II. BUT TURN WE TO GOD’S ALL-SUFFICIENCY. “ With God all things are possible ; ” and this we learn from the very circumstances which teach us our own impossibilities.

1. See this in all our public undertakings,—

(a) *Our educational efforts are blessed.* Many pious parents rejoice and praise God over their converted children. Our schools do produce palpable results. Men and women grow up attesting that with God “ all things are possible,” and that though without Him and his

grace, the best schemes are nought ; with Him nothing is too hard for us.

- (b) *So among the most abandoned of our home population*, what trophies of his power have been witnessed ! Hundreds might be called in evidence of the triumphs of piety and philanthropy. Our Ragged-schools and Reformatories ; our Associations against intemperance ; our abstinence efforts ; our individual instances of self-denial and dedication to works of love are not in vain,—a great harvest has been reaped, and there is promise of a greater.
- (c) *So abroad, among the heathen*, thousands and tens of thousands have embraced Christianity. If in some places few or none are converted, in others large churches cannot contain the converts,—proving that though it is impossible with man to convert the heathen, it is not so with God.

2. Thus in all the varieties of individual sin, sorrow, and crime, God shows continually his power to save, and that nothing is too hard for Him. (Gen. xviii. 14 ; Jer. xxxii. 27.)

—*Holy Scripture records instances of every kind.* A savage jailor and a pious seller of purple ; a Nicodemus or Nathanael and a Saul of Tarsus ; pharisee and publican ; moral and immoral ; self-righteous and abandoned,—all yield to the mighty pressure of grace. *So now, godliness is confined to no rank, class, or profession.* Nobles and peasants ; delicate women and sturdy mechanics ; soldiers, sailors, civilians ; the poorest and the richest,—all lend proofs that with God all things are possible.

—*And in our own hearts*, mountains of difficulty are overcome. We find “that without Him we *can do nothing* ;” but “that *all things* are possible to him that believeth.”

—“I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.” (Philippians iv. 13.)

What practical motives are here for more animated exertion in *working out our own salvation* !

—God’s co-operation, and all sufficient help, not an excuse for idleness, but a stimulus to exertion, and a corrective for despondency. You can do absolutely nothing without Him ; but depending on Him, nothing need discourage you, nothing is impossible, final success must be yours !

—*So in all our public and united efforts for the good of man*—what instruction is here ? It is impossible that we can convert the heathen ;

impossible that we can turn the hearts of children to God ; impossible to reclaim the abandoned, the lost, and miserable ; all impossible for us, alone, unhelpt ; but let us redouble our efforts in God's strength, and impossibilities become possible—the heathen deserts shall smile, the youthful hearts shall be preserved from after ruin, and the vilest shall be saved, and God's almightiness shall be glorified in man's weakness !
 “ When I am weak then am I strong ! ” (2 Cor. xii. 10.)

XIII.

THE RECORD OF LIFE.

1 John v. 11, 12. *“ And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life ; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”*

THE word “ RECORD ” is here very emphatic : it occurs eleven times in six verses (in the original) ; v. 6, “ The Spirit beareth witness ; ” v. 7, “ There are three that bear record ; ” v. 8, 9, “ Witness,” or Record “ of God ; ” “ Witness of men, &c. ; ” v. 10, “ Witness in himself,” or “ believeth not the witness,” testimony, or record “ of God ! ” And in the text, the great subject of this record is propounded : “ This is the Record,” &c.

—So great solemnity of utterance, and iteration of testimony, indicates the vastness of the truth revealed : may God, by his Spirit, enable us to receive and believe it. Let us consider—

I. THE MATTER TESTIFIED—“ that God hath given us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son.”

II. THE INFERENCE DRAWN. Therefore, “ he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

I. “ THE RECORD : ”—“ God hath given us eternal life.”

1. The nature of the gift implies the condition of those to whom it is given. Life could only be given to those who were dead : no such gift to angels.

—*Death in every sense our condition and portion.*

—*Temporal death* has passed upon all of us, with all its painful circumstances and consequences : all die, all must see corruption.

—*Spiritual death*—"dead in trespasses and sins." (Ephes. ii. 1.)

—*Eternal death*—whatever that may mean—"everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt. xxv. 41.)

This is the condition, portion, liability, of all those for whom Christ died : else, life were no boon to them.

2. To such God gives "LIFE."

"You hath he quickened" or made alive. (Ephes. ii. 1.) "He passeth from death unto life." (John v. 24.) This is conversion—being dead, we live—"alive unto God through Jesus Christ." (Romans vi. 11.) This is spiritual life, given to those who were spiritually dead : leading to *eternal life*—it is life eternal—it is eternal existence begun—when we live spiritually, we commence our eternal existence, and "shall never die !" (John xi. 26.)

3. This is a free gift of Almighty God.

"God hath given to us eternal life." "The wages of sin is death ; but the *gift of God* is eternal life." (Romans vi. 23.) A free, unmerited, rich, merciful gift of his own love to sinners. Could the dead purchase it, merit it ? "No man hath quickened his own soul" (Prayer-book version)—"Can keep alive his own soul" (Psalm xxii. 29)—both translations true.

4. This gift, "this life is in his Son !"

—*Life is and was in Christ essentially, personally, his being.* "In him was life, &c." (John i. 4.) So also in John v. 21, "Not only as the Father raiseth the dead, &c., so the Son ;" but (v. 26) "as the Father hath life in himself, so the Son hath life in himself." As the living principle, and source of all being natural and spiritual dwells originally and spontaneously in God, so does it also in Christ. So He gives eternal life, and raises the dead as He will. Of which his own resurrection a proof. (Rev. i. 18.)

—*This life is in Him as our federal head, and so is "OUR LIFE."*

—"When Christ, who is our life, &c." (Col. iii. 3, 4.) "Your life is hid with Christ, in God." As in Adam, all who were in Adam died—so in Christ, all who are in Christ live. "In him all fulness dwells," and that fulness is ours.

—*This life we derive from Him by the union of faith*—it is imparted to us, and we live by Him—He first gives, and He sustains it. But only so long as united to Him, the severed limb partakes not of the vitality of the body. Only as we abide in Him, we have life, and

yield the fruits of life. "To me to live is Christ" (Philip. i. 12);—"We live through him" (1 John iv. 9);—"Christ liveth in me, &c." (Gal. ii. 20.)

II. NOW THE INFERENCE IS OBVIOUS: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." And this will furnish matter of application also.

1. What, then, is it "to have Christ?"

So much depends on this! To have Him is to possess Him, to have Him as our own; "to receive him" (John i. 11, 12); to believe on Him, to accept and embrace Him as our salvation, our all. To be one with Him, grafted into Him, a member of his body; to dwell in Him and walk in Him. How much penitence, and faith, and prayer, and love, implied in this!

2. He who thus has Christ "HAS LIFE."

—How much is implied in this! He has life—he lives indeed—spiritually, eternally—he has all that is in Christ—he has the casket and all the jewels it contains—"All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's!" (1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.) "Of his fulness have all we received, &c." (John i. 16.) "How shall he not, with him, also freely give us all things?" (Rom. viii. 32.)

3. "He that hath not the Son of God hath not life!"

Oh what an alternative! Without Christ we have nothing! In Him, by Him, through Him, we have all things—life and every blessing—but if we have not Christ, do not possess Him, love Him, believe in Him, we have nothing, nothing but death—temporal, spiritual, eternal! Oh! what is that? Look into tomb, grave, coffin;—mouldering remains, corruption—that is death—bodily death—but we cannot look into hell—the second death—but it is a worm that never dieth, a fire unquenchable! Oh! to be without Christ is perdition!

Brethren, which portion is yours? Life or death? Heaven or hell? "Eternal punishment," or eternal glory?

—Is Christ yours? Do you know Him, love Him, follow Him? Are you crucified with Him, dead with Him, risen with Him? *How appalling the condition of a Christless sinner!* May the Lord in mercy arouse, convince, convert, and "reveal Christ in you."

—*But having Christ*, believing in Him, loving Him, if He is yours, there

is no limit to the blessings which are made over to you by covenant and by oath: "You have all and abound"—"you possess all things"—"unsearchable riches." Oh! live up to your privileges; and walk worthily of them!

XIV.

WALKING WITH GOD.

Genesis v. 24. "*And Enoch walked with God.*"

THE figurative language of the ancient Scriptures sometimes obsolete, but always beautiful and expressive. We may safely commit ourselves to its guidance, and the more narrowly we investigate it the more richly will truth be developed. Thus the simple expression of "walking with" any one, in modern language, would not at all denote the full import of this phrase in Scripture. Let us explore its meaning, in dependence on God's blessing! In order the better to understand it let us consider—

I. THE IMPORT OF THIS PHRASE WITH REFERENCE TO MEN.

II. ITS IMPORT WITH REFERENCE TO GOD.

The former may enable us to comprehend the latter.

I. 1. There must be agreement:—

"Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos iii. 3.) Not like two dogs coupled together, each trying to go his own way—not as "unequally yoked together." They must agree as to the place to which they should go, the pace they walk, &c. They must be "of one mind."

2. It denotes friendship and habits of intimacy.

"We walked in the house of God as friends." (Psalm lv. 14 *Prayer-book version*.) "Taking sweet counsel together." Love for each other—esteem, respect, confidence.

3. Delight in each other's society:

—distressed when absent, desiring return,—interchange of thought and feeling: not dispute, differ, wrangle, but exploring subjects of common interest.

4. All this is founded on similarity of tastes and pursuits.

A common interest in common subjects.

—*The lovers of the sublime and beautiful*—fellow-travellers explore together scenes of grandeur, &c.

—*Lovers of the fine arts*—they walk together, and at much expense and trouble explore the depositories of vertu.

—*Lovers of science*—physical, or metaphysical,—consort in schools of knowledge.

—*So of literature*, and so of *the lovers of pleasure*—the fashionable, the gay, the dissipated, congregate in scenes of folly.

—Lower down the scale—*the vicious* :—see their *Bachanalian* revels

—the theatre—the race-course—the gaming-houses—the gin-palaces

—do not such men “walk together?” Alas! they are the multitude walking together in the broad road that leads to destruction!

—Thus in contrast, *God’s children walk together*—drawn together by same love to same Saviour—by common sympathies, tastes, pursuits

—God’s glory—the salvation of his people, and by a thousand thoughts in common, they associate together.

II. NOW JUST SO GOD WALKS WITH HIS PEOPLE AND THEY WITH HIM: “Enoch walked with God.”

1. He was reconciled to Him.

Man is separated from Him, at enmity to Him—has no pleasure in Him—avoids Him ;—prayer and holy communion are strange to us ; therefore, before we can walk with God we must be “converted,” “born again,” and “made new creatures,” and so have new hearts, new tastes, desires, pleasures.

2. Then there is friendship—yes, friendship with God.

Wonderful! yet true—every believer is “the friend of God.” “Abraham, my friend.” (Isaiah xli. 8, *cum* Exodus xxxiii. 11.) “I call you not servants, but friends.” (John xv. 15.) Not equality, immense DISTANCE, far more than between the master and his dog—yet see how the dumb animal loves his master. My Father—my friend—my God! And He is to me “a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” (Proverbs xviii. 24.)

3. There is delight in each other’s society!

—Yes, not only does the believer delight in God, but “God delights in him.” “Delight thyself also in the Lord,” &c. (Psalm xxxvii. 4.) “Because he delighteth in me.” (Psalm xviii. 19.) “The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, &c.” (Psalm cxlvii. 11.) And how does the believer delight in his God! He longs for Him,

thirsts for Him. (Psalm xlii. 2.) His word, his house, his ordinances, the delight of his heart. God hath said, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them, &c." (2 Cor. vi. 16, *cum* Ezek. xxxvii. 27.)

4. Similarity, identity of pursuits, interests, tastes, occupations.

These draw together man to man, and these alone unite man with God! As "God is not in all the thoughts" of the unconverted, so is He in every thought of the converted man. "They that are after the Spirit do mind the things of the Spirit"—"are spiritually minded." (Romans viii. 5, 6.) "They seek the things that are Jesus Christ's":—not like the ungodly—(Philip. ii. 21.) God's glory—his honour among men—the extension of his kingdom—the salvation of the souls for whom He died—these and all the active duties springing out of these things, form the interest of life to the believer. What God loves, He loves; what God hates, He hates; the will of God is his will; his whole being is cast into the mould of God; no pleasure out of Him—no care, but the fear of offending Him! What union, communion, fellowship in prayer and praise! He walks with God in the enjoyment of his presence, in reliance on his promises, in obedience to his commands.

—*Who, then, among us is walking with God?* Are you reconciled to Him in Christ Jesus? Have you been convinced of sin? Have you fled to Him for mercy? Have you found it? Are your sins forgiven? Is your conscience at rest in Jesus? If not you cannot walk with God, you cannot take a step in his company! You are going one way and He another—you walk in opposite directions!

—*Now He meets you in the way!* He sends me to tell you that you have lost your way; that the path you tread leads to destruction. He would take you by the hand and lead you aright! Oh! do not resist his grace, listen to his mercy, and this day repent and believe, and you shall begin to walk in newness of life! May God's grace work in you mightily!

—*Oh! ye who know Him and love Him!* walk much with Him in secret prayer, in holy meditation on Scripture, in self-denying obedience! Look up to Him for help—"be strong in Him," and He will keep you even to the day of Jesus Christ!

XV.

SALVATION NEGLECTED.

Hebrews ii. 3. "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ?*"

ST. PAUL compares the privileges and responsibilities of the ancient Church with those of the Christian dispensation. "God spoke to the fathers by the prophets—but in these last days he hath spoken unto us by his Son" (chap. i. 1, 2). Upon His glory he then dwells; and returning to the original idea in this chapter,—"*Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed, &c.*" (ver. 1); if judgments fell on them for despising less mercies, "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ?*"

Let us, in dependance on Divine aid, consider—

I. THIS GREAT SALVATION.

II. THE SIN OF NEGLECTING IT.

III. THE GUILT AND DANGER OF THAT SIN.

I. 1. The greatness of the salvation may be measured by the greatness of the ruin from which it delivers us.

—From what height had man fallen—into what depths had he sunk! From perfect purity to entire corruption. Man—the whole man—mind, soul, body—all his powers, faculties, senses, appetites—all polluted, alienated, and "at enmity with God." *Guilty*, too, and exposed to God's wrath and everlasting damnation. *Helpless*, unable to save himself, and with no future prospect but the just wrath of Almighty God. What must that salvation be which could suffice to save from so great condemnation?

2. The greatness of this salvation appears also by contemplating the character of those by whom it was achieved.

It was no other than GOD himself, Jehovah in his threefold nature—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. (See context.) "Spoken by the Lord" Jesus—"God" the Father "bearing witness," "and the Holy Ghost according to his will." It was God the Holy Father who loved the world and gave his Son—it was that Son who gave himself for us, and by that Holy Ghost alone can we draw nigh to that Father through that Son:—the whole power of

the threefold Godhead was put forth to accomplish man's salvation—what then, how great, how wonderful must that salvation be ?

3. The greatness of this salvation appears in the perfect accomplishment of the object in view.

It is enough, full, perfect, sufficient! Great as was the ruin, greater the recovery ; wide as the desolation, wider the restoration. Lost, condemned, polluted, rebellious man is by it saved—justified—sanctified ; restored to the favour and love of God, and eventually glorified. “ If every creature ” be lost, this Gospel is sent to every creature ; no boundary no limit,—“ Go into all the world,” &c. (Mark xvi. 15.)

II. THE SIN OF NEGLECTING THIS SALVATION. What is the nature of this offence ?

It is not that of the scoffer, of the blasphemer, nor of the reckless worldling ; not that of them “ who say unto God, Depart from us ! ” not that of the vicious, the unjust, the dishonest, nor that of the sceptic nor infidel. It is only of *neglect* that the apostle speaks. Men pass by it, slight it, disregard salvation, esteeming it practically of little importance. How does this appear ? How brought home ?

—God has appointed various ordinances and means of grace to be channels of his salvation to the soul,—the neglect of these will prove neglect of salvation.

—Here is *the written word of God* : full of salvation from end to end. Now, if men do not read it, study it, pray over it, they neglect the Bible, and so are guilty of neglecting the salvation and God of the Bible !

—Salvation is conveyed to the souls of believers in and *through the Lord's Supper*,—specially, pre-eminently ; therefore all who neglect the Lord's Supper neglect salvation.

—This may be applied to every religious duty. To neglect private prayer, family prayer, or the house of God, or the ministry of the Word, is to neglect God and his salvation. That is the sin here condemned.

III. SEE THE GUILT AND DANGER OF THIS SIN. Men think lightly of it ; but it is perilous and destructive.

1. See its operation between man and man.

A son neglects his aged father : he does not abuse him, nor insult him, nor give him an unkind word ; but he neglects him, and lets him want and starve ! That husband : he does not ill-treat his wife, is not brutal towards her, does nothing actually unkind to her, but simply neglects her, and that neglect breaks her heart ! Let the neglected father, the neglected friend, the neglected wife, say what the sin must be of neglecting the merciful, the good, the great, the holy God ! It is not "the wicked" only who shall be turned into hell, but also "all the people who forget God" !

2. The danger of this sin is as great as its guilt.

"How shall we escape if we neglect this salvation?" Is there any other salvation?—any other mode of averting God's wrath? Neglecting this, "What then shall I do when God riseth up; and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?" (Job xxxi. 14.) This is not only the way to God, but there is none other. All who believe this shall be saved; and all who believe not shall be damned! How escape?

Let all examine themselves.

Are there those who are conscious that they have neglected this great salvation? Oh, that they would repent and turn to God, and believe and be saved!

Are there those who are conscious that their regard to this salvation is lukewarm, "neither cold nor hot?" Let them too, consider, and turn aside, and contemplate God's great salvation, until their very hearts are touched by it.

And let all who love this salvation glorify God for it and by it. May their whole hearts be filled with love and praise; and may the constancy of their faith, and the abundance of their holy works, show their value of this "GREAT SALVATION!"

XVI.

THE KING'S HIGHWAY.

Isaiah xxxv. 8—10. “*And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness ; the unclean shall not pass over it ; but it shall be for those : the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there ; but the redeemed shall walk there : And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*”

TO whatever period of Jewish story these words may be interpreted to apply, their highest and holiest import is with reference to the Church of God itself, as the translators head the passage, “the privileges of the Gospel ;” “the joyful flourishing of Christ’s kingdom.” Believing this to be the chief mind of the Spirit in this prophecy, we will thus consider it :—

I. THE WAY.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO WALK IN IT.

III. THE END TO WHICH IT LEADS.

I. “An highway shall be there.” What is this way ?

1. Generally it is the way to God and glory ; “the narrow way that leads to life ;” Gospel salvation.

—More *definitely*, it is *Christ Himself*, so often predicted and described as “the way,” comprehending all other characteristics of this way (chap. xliii. 19 ; lvii. 14 ; lxii. 10—12 ; Mal. iii. 1), *cum* (John xiv. 6), “I am the way,” &c. ; and (Acts xvi. 17), “Who show us the way of salvation.”

—“That thy way may be known upon earth.”

2. This is emphatically called *the way*, and the highway, because it is the way of God’s appointment,—the only way of salvation.

“No man cometh unto the Father but by him.” All other ways

are delusive, dangerous, yea, lead to death. God's own, only, blessed way.

3. "The way of holiness," or "the holy way."

—*Because God's holiness is thereby vindicated and honoured.* In Christ Jesus, in his expiatory death, atonement, propitiation, a righteous law is satisfied; the eternal principles of Justice are established, so "that God can be just, and justify the ungodly"! (Rom. iv. 5; v. 6.)

—And it is the way of holiness, *because by it alone holiness is secured in his people.* Christ died not only to save and justify, but to "redeem from all iniquity," &c. (Titus ii. 14.) And in Him, and by virtue of union with Him alone, can his people be made holy; He is to them "*sanctification*," as well as "*redemption*." (1 Cor. i. 30.) Hence—

II. THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO WALK IN THIS WAY.

1. They are "the redeemed and the ransomed of the Lord."

"Washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Redeemed from the curse of the law, the penalty of sin, the fear of death and judgment; from the power and dominion of sin. Ransomed,—their debt paid; the purchase-money of their redemption laid down; "bought with a price" (1 Cor. vi. 20); once Satan's slaves, now the Lord's freed men.

2. The sanctified.

"The unclean shall not pass over it." It is a holy way, and only holy people walk in it. By its promises they cleanse themselves "from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit," &c. (2 Cor. vii. 1.) "The grace of God which bringeth salvation teaches them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts." (Titus ii. 12.) "Washed, justified, sanctified," &c. (1 Cor. vi. 11.)

3. They are a simple people, but shall not lose their way.

"Wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." They "are the poor in spirit, the meek, lowly," lightly esteemed and despised. "Small" in their own eyes, and in the eyes of the world; "fools and blind," yet led aright,—they go forth as blind men, not knowing whither they go; but, guided by a faithful hand, they shall not wander far.

4. They are as feeble and defenceless as they are simple.

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves."

Satan as "a roaring lion threatens to devour them." Evil men and evil spirits threaten and alarm them ; but they are safe—as Daniel in the lions' den. The Lord will shut their mouths or drive them away. "No lion nor ravenous beast shall be there," &c. "Resist the devil and he shall flee from you." (James iv. 7 ; 1 Pet. v. 9.) And the completeness of the deliverance looks towards—

III. THE GLORIOUS END OF THIS WAY. This end is "ZION:" evidently heaven ; the spiritual "Jerusalem which is above," to which *alone* this description can accurately apply. "The heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. xii. 22) ; "Jerusalem above, the mother of us all" (Gal. iv. 26) ; to which all "the Israel of God" shall come. (Rev. xxi., xxii.)

—*This state is the end of all sorrow*—"Sorrow and sighing shall flee away." "God shall wipe all tears from our eyes." (Chap. xxv. 8, and Rev. vii. 17 and xxi. 4.)

—*The commencement of perfect and eternal joy*—"Songs, everlasting joy—joy and gladness !" like two seraphs calling us to glory, while "sorrow and sighing," like two evil angels, fly away for ever.

—*Now this is the way, and these are the travellers on it*—are you among them ? Whither are you going ? Step by step, day by day, year by year, towards Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem ? Or where ? Ah ! whither ! There is but one other end of Life's journey ; you know where that is—not everlasting joy, but grief, woe, despair—"Shame and everlasting contempt !" Will you journey further on that road ? Oh ! stop, sinner, stop, retrace your steps, turn your face "Zion-ward," forsake the paths that lead to death, and God will receive you, and pardon you, and set your feet upon a rock, and establish your goings !

—*Let the Redeemed of the Lord among you take courage.* "Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed,"—press onward, look forward, forget that which is behind, and soon your day of trial, temptation, and trouble, shall end, and "you shall be ever with the Lord !"

XVII.

THE BELIEVER SATISFIED.

Psalm xvii. 15.—“*I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.*”

DAVID’S deep-toned spirituality, intimate acquaintance with God, and holy affection! Believers in every age sympathize with him. How striking the contrast (ver. 13, 14)—“men of the world,” satisfied with toys, with temporal benefits, full of earthly things; “but, as for me,” be my portion different. I would see thy face,—to know, love, and be with thee, oh God! yet shall I never be fully satisfied in this world. “When I awake, then I shall be satisfied with thy likeness!”

—Oh, for spiritual perception, and holy affections like these! God grant them unto us by his Holy Spirit!

I. THAT THE BELIEVER’S SPIRITUAL DESIRES ARE NEVER FULLY SATISFIED IN THIS WORLD.

II. THAT THEY SHALL BE HEREAFTER.

I. The believer is not a querulous, discontented person; he is not dissatisfied with his condition here, nor with God’s dealings with him; he is humble, thankful, contented, and resigned to the will of God, but his *spiritual desires* are never fully gratified here.

1. Consider what those desires are,—comprehended in two lines.

—*He longs for the enjoyment of God’s presence in his soul*,—to know Him as a father,—to love Him as a friend,—to talk with Him,—commune with Him, and “to see him as he is.”

—*He desires conformity to his image*: to be like God—“merciful as he is merciful,” “pure as he is pure”—to show himself a child of God, in temper, tongue, and life,—“to grow up into him in all things.”

2. These desires are in great measure accomplished.

—*He does experience much of God’s presence*: in secret prayer, in holy meditation, in deep and constant study of his Word, in the hearing of his Gospel, and in his holy Supper—God is often very near him—his soul enjoys peace—sometimes joy and rejoicing—and

heaven is brought down to him. "He delights himself in the Lord, &c." (Psalm xxxvii. 4.) "God manifests himself to him, &c." (John xiv. 21.) His soul is "satiated, and his sleep is sweet." (Jeremiah xxxi. 25, 26.) "The secret of the Lord is with him." (Psalm xxv. 14.) "He finds consolation in Christ Jesus, and comfort of love, &c." (Philip. ii. 1.)

—*He is also in a measure conformed to God's image* : "Changed in the same image, &c." (2 Cor. iii. 18.) "Sin has not dominion over him, &c." (Romans vi. 14.) If it be not so with him he is not a believer. "Faith worketh by love"—"without works faith is dead, &c." Moral reformation the only sure test of faith.

3. But yet much always remains to be desired.

—*The more the believer enjoys of God's presence the more he desires it !* Who had been so near as Moses ? Yet he prayed, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory !" (Exodus xxxiii. 18.) Or David, who prayed, "Lord, open thou mine eyes, &c." (Psalm cxix. 18.) At best we see "through a glass," or rather as in a glass, "darkly," dimly reflected. We speak as children. We catch only passing glimpses of his love—disturbed, distracted by sin, the world, and Satan.

—*And the nearer he approaches God's likeness, the more he longs for perfection* : he sees such dark spots in himself, so faint an image of his God—so imperfect a resemblance that with himself he never can nor will be satisfied, but earnestly longs for the day of absolute perfection—then, and not till then, will he be satisfied !

II. A DAY OF PERFECT SATISFACTION IS COMING : When ? "When I awake I shall be satisfied with thy likeness."

1. This implies that there must be sleep first.

All have died, and all must die—"Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead." No, they are only asleep. "David fell on sleep." (Acts xiii. 36.) "Stephen," amidst his murderers, "fell asleep" (vii. 60). "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." All departed believers "sleep in Jesus." (1 Thess. iv. 14.) A soft pillow for a weary head.

2. These sleepers shall awake !

"When I awake." David speaks of it as a sure event—whether he fully understood it, it matters not—we know it and understand it. (Psalm xvi. 8—11.) "My flesh shall rest in hope, &c." (s. 2). "The resurrection and the life" are familiar to us. "Life and immortality

are brought to light." "Because Christ lives we shall live also."
 "All that are in their graves shall hear his voice, &c."

3. Then, and not till then, will the believer be satisfied—all imperfect and incomplete till then; even the souls in Paradise wait for the resurrection, crying, "*How long?*" The soul and body perfected and glorified, and the believer's cup is full. (1 Cor. xv. 54.) The double desire of his soul shall be satisfied.

—*He will see Him as He is, and be ever with Him*: the redeemed will never lose the enjoyment of his sensible presence. No cloud between, no shadows, no interruption, no sin, sorrow, Satan, nor evil world to disturb: his soul "thirsted" for God, and he drinks for ever of that well.

—*God's perfect likeness is restored*—"We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is!" (1 John iii. 2.) The last feature of Satan's image effaced—once more "very good," and never more to fall—spontaneously holy—"without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing!"

—*Therefore "he is satisfied"*—every wish is accomplished, every expectation surpassed, nothing left to be desired—"his joy is full"—enough, enough—oh! bliss beyond conception—ineffable, undisturbed, eternal! "Oh! come Lord Jesus, come quickly."

—Where is your heart? and where your portion? *Is it where David's was?* Then shall you never be disappointed—your present feelings are the earnest of future, eternal ones—"Joy and peace in believing" are the foretaste of the joys which are "at God's right-hand for evermore." Seek more, and get more, till you can say, "With my whole heart have I sought thee."

—*But if you are a stranger to such desires*—if your heart, your treasure, your all, are here, earthly, temporal, how sad your state—you will never be "satisfied" in either world—mortification, disappointment, vanity, await you here; and in the hereafter, despair, "everlasting contempt and shame!"

—*Oh that you would turn and seek after God*—"Oh taste and see that the Lord is good, &c." (Psalm xxxiv. 8.)

XVIII.

JOB'S CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST.

Job xix. 25—27. "*For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God : Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another ; though my reins be consumed within me.*"

THERE may be some obscurity in the critical interpretation of this passage ; and it may be difficult to determine how far Job understood his own words : we know that many of the Old Testament prophets did not comprehend the prophecies uttered by them (1 Peter i. 10—12), while some of the ancients were favoured with bright glimpses of a coming Redeemer.

With the light of the Gospel reflected back upon it, the Christian cannot fail rightly to interpret these words. God grant us grace to see their true import. Here is—

I. THE BELIEVER'S VIEW OF CHRIST.

II. THE BELIEVER'S VIEW OF HIMSELF.

III. THE CONFIDENCE WITH WHICH HE HOLDS THESE VIEWS.

I. THE BELIEVER'S VIEW OF CHRIST.

1. He is his "Redeemer," "My Redeemer," "MY GOD," "my nearest of kin," bound to redeem my inheritance, as Boaz did for Ruth.

—*Our inheritance was lost and forfeited*—Christ became our kinsman, "flesh of our flesh," that He might be qualified to redeem our estate. We owed a vast debt and had nothing to pay, and He has paid it. "I have found a ransom." (Job xxxiii. 24.) "He was delivered for our offences," &c. (Rom. iv. 25.) "He has redeemed us from the curse of the law, for he became a curse for us." (Gal. iii. 10, 13.)

2. He is a living Saviour : "He liveth."

Fine testimony ! Hundreds of years before He was born into the world, it was said, "He liveth"—through succeeding ages "He

liveth"—now "He liveth"—"the living one"—the self-existing God and Saviour! "The glory which he had with the Father before the worlds were." (John xvii. 5.) "Ever liveth." (Heb. vii. 25; Romans vi. 9.) "Dieth no more,"—A glorious living Lord, the believer contemplates Him.

3. "He shall stand upon the earth at the latter day."

—*This was the Gospel-day then future*—and He did come, and stood in Jerusalem, and on Mount Olivet—his sacred feet trod the land of promise—all was fulfilled.

—*He will stand again upon the earth*—"He will so come as they saw him go into heaven," "in the clouds," "with a shout," "in his glory, and all the holy angels with him"—He will sit on his throne and judge the world.

—*He will then appear as God*—"In my flesh shall I see God!" because I shall see Christ, who is God. He is my Redeemer and my God: oh that He would come quickly.

II. THE BELIEVER'S VIEW OF HIMSELF: he is to be eaten of worms, &c.

1. His body must become corrupt:

"After my skin, worms destroy this body"—first the skin, then the flesh, a prey to worms. Humbling thought! the fairest, loveliest, delicate, tender, as much as the old, the fate of all! "The worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee." (Isaiah xiv. 11.) "I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother and sister." (Job xvii. 14.) "They shall lie down alike, and the worms shall cover them." (xxi. 26.) "Dust thou art, &c."

2. "Yet in my flesh shall I see God."

A clear prediction of the resurrection of the body—how else, after having been eaten of worms, could he "see God in *his flesh*?" Why "did David's flesh rest in hope." (Psalm xvi. 9.) If the body, *or something that is buried*, does not rise again, how shall "all who are in *their graves* hear the voice of the son of man?" (John v. 25 and 28.) How is "this vile body to be made a glorious body" if it does not rise again? (Philip. iii. 20, 21.)

III. THE CONFIDENCE OF THE BELIEVER IN THESE TRUTHS: "I KNOW that my Redeemer liveth!"

—*The certainty of faith's knowledge.* This is a knowledge of a peculiar kind. In one sense, the ordinary one, Job could have had

no knowledge of these things : he had never seen his living Redeemer, nor had any one else ; he had not been eaten of worms and lived again, nor had any one else ; yet "*he knew it*," that is, he believed it confidently—the knowledge of faith, and its certainty, how blessed ! This is just what men are now stealing from us, substituting universal doubt.

—*See his appropriating knowledge !* "I know that **MY REDEEMER** liveth, &c." The conviction, however strong, that there was a living Redeemer would have given him no comfort—he wanted a Redeemer for himself—"my Redeemer." So in verse 27, "Whom I shall see **FOR MYSELF**, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." Until there is a personal appropriation of Christ, there is no saving faith ! "My beloved is mine, and I am his." (Canticles ii. 16.)

1. *Can you look forward to these solemn events with composure, hope, assurance ?* Your death ! its certainty, appointed, fixed—your coffin, grave,—all the circumstances ordained ! Can you look at them ? or do you shrink from them ? terrible, dreaded, hateful ? Yet no escape ! They must come ! The worm must feed on you, &c.

—Oh ! prepare to meet thy God ! "You must see him, and for yourself, and none other !" "What, then, shall I do when God riseth up, and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him ?" (Job xxxi. 14.)

—Oh repent, believe, look to this Redeemer and be saved.

2. *But if you have this knowledge, this confidence, trust, and conviction of faith, how blessed are ye !* How cheerfully anticipate all the obsequies of death and supposed horrors of the grave,—"*The clods of the valley shall be sweet unto you.*" (Chap. xxi. 33.) "*I KNOW*," that is enough for me ! "*WE KNOW* that if our earthly house be dissolved, **WE HAVE** a building, &c." (2 Cor. v. 1.) "Therefore we are always **CONFIDENT**, &c." (v. 6—8). "We will hold fast the confidence, &c." (Heb. iii. 6, 12.) "Yea, we shall have "**CONFIDENCE** at his coming." (1 John ii. 28.)

—Take away our *certainty of faith*, infuse one particle of speculative, philosophic doubt,—"*Yea, hath God said ?*" Are you *sure* ? perhaps ? &c., and we make shipwreck of all ! Regard all teachers of doubt as the enemies of God !

XIX.

STRENGTHENED IN THE LORD.

Zechariah x. 12. *"And I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the Lord!"*

THIS is a glorious prophecy of the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity—as the succeeding chapter is a prediction of their subsequent rejection of Messiah, and their present dispersion on account of it. But the words of the text are the heir-loom of the Israel of God—a promise to which not even the pious Jew can lay an exclusive claim. The phraseology indicates the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The speaker must be Divine—"I will strengthen them;" yet he says, "in THE LORD," as of another, in "whose name they are to walk up and down"—and then there is the ratification, "saith THE LORD!" However this may be, the privileges of believers here set forth are sure.

I. THEY ARE UNITED TO GOD—they are "IN the Lord."

II. THEY ARE "STRENGTHENED IN HIM."

III. THEY HAVE HOLY LIBERTY OF WALKING BY HIM: "they walk up and down in his name."

—May our souls appreciate and be refreshed by these "exceeding great and precious promises!"

I. GOD'S PEOPLE ARE IN HIM, UNITED TO HIM. They cannot be strengthened in Him until they are united to Him.

1. By nature all are separate from God—

—they are not his people, not in Him: they may be outwardly united to Him, they may be one with Him by external rites, as by Baptism and the Supper of the Lord, or even by holy orders; but if they are personally unholy, unsanctified, ungodly, they are not spiritually in Him, nor can they derive any unction from Him.

2. Conversion is the personal union of the sinner with God, through Christ, by faith.

By nature OUT of Christ, by grace he is put IN Him—as "the wild

olive-tree engrafted," &c. (Romans xi. 17, 24.) "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." (2 Cor. v. 17.) "Not circumcision, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." (Gal. vi. 15.) Then he becomes one with God—dwells in him—and God in him—"has fellowship with the Father and the Son." (1 John i. 3.)

II. THOSE WHO ARE THUS UNITED TO GOD BY SAVING FAITH IN CHRIST ARE STRENGTHENED IN HIM,—“I will strengthen them in the Lord.”

1. They are exceedingly weak in themselves.

—Weak in judgment, in will and purpose, in power, in grace, in goodness,—in fact, in themselves they have no strength. “Without me,” saith Jesus, “ye can do nothing.” (John xv. 5.) “We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything,” &c. (2 Cor. iii. 5.) Utterly helpless, without grace!

2. They have also mighty enemies.

—“The devil as a roaring lion,” &c. (1 Peter v. 8.) The world, with all its snares and all its frowns,—the flesh, in-dwelling sin, the corrupt nature clinging to them; left to themselves they would be swallowed up. “Satan has desired to have thee,” &c. (Luke xxii. 31.)

3. Nothing less than Divine strength will avail them: and they have it.

—Almighty strength is in them—God and his power,—“I will strengthen them in the Lord.” “But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” (1 Sam. xxx. 6.) “And Jonathan strengthened David’s hand in God.” (1 Sam. xxiii. 16.) The New Testament is identical,—“Strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might!” (Ephes. vi. 10.) “When I am weak,” in myself, “then am I strong” in the Lord! (2 Cor. xii. 10.) “I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.” (Philippians iv. 13.) “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. ii. 1.)

III. THEY HAVE A HOLY LIBERTY IN WALKING IN HIM. “They shall walk up and down in his name, saith the Lord.” A most emphatic and remarkable phrase. We know that believers “walk with God,” and God with them,—that “He dwells in them and walks in them;” but this is more—“they walk up and down in his name!” The Gospel phrase is near it—“As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk

ye in Him." (Col. ii. 6.) And the prophet Micah (iv. 5),—"We will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever."

1. "To walk" always means practical life; and to "walk up and down" must mean freedom, activity, diligence,—that course of usefulness marked out for each of us—our separate mission. "All this shall be done IN HIS NAME,"—

—*That is, on his authority*,—not on our own—because He has commanded it. He has sent us—not in our own name, or any other name—but making "mention of his only."

—*In his strength*,—leaning on his promises.

—*For his glory*,—honouring Him in everything,—in "our substance,"—in the common things of life. "Whether we eat or drink, all to his glory."

—*Realizing his presence*,—"setting Him always before us,"—"seeing Him who is invisible,"—"heartily as unto the Lord."

2. In this spirit believers will walk up and down.

—*In their conduct in the world and in the Church*, how boldly, faithfully, honestly, consistently will they walk "in his name!" No compromise,—no double conformity,—no sinister actions.

—*In their secret walk with God*,—they will walk up and down in his promises, in his Word, in communion and fellowship with Him. "They shall go in and out and find pasture." (John x. 9.) Firm in doctrine, unshaken in faith—not "driven to and fro by every wind of doctrine." "Strong in faith, giving glory to God."

—*They shall walk up and down in his name eternally*,—"in white robes, with palms in their hands," &c. (Rev. vii. 9.) They shall "follow the Lamb," without weariness, sorrow, care, and worship Him, in his GREAT NAME, DAY AND NIGHT.

1. How anxious should we all be to know whether we are "in the Lord!"

2. Being in Him, how careful to keep near to Him, to maintain intercourse with Him, to draw strength out of Him.

3. And then to walk in Him,—to live by Him,—actively to serve Him,—consecrated to Him!—"our whole spirit and soul and body."

XX.

THE BRAZEN SERPENT.

John iii. 14, 15. *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”*

HERE is properly A TYPE: a story, figure, or symbol actually applied in the New Testament to Christ: nothing less than this constitutes a type. Our Lord compares himself to the brazen serpent,—as that was lifted up among the dying Israelites, so He, the Lord Jesus Christ, must be lifted up among perishing sinners, and all who believe and look at Him shall live.

Let us compare the type and the antitype.

I. IN THE DEADLY NATURE OF THE MALADY.

II. IN THE APPARENT INSUFFICIENCY OF THE REMEDY.

III. IN THE SUDDENNESS AND PERFECTION OF THE CURE.

I. IN THE DESPERATE NATURE OF THE MALADY.

1. What could be more fatal or terrible than this judgment?

The people had again sinned (Numbers xxi. 5, &c.),—“their soul was discouraged,—they spake against God, and against Moses:” and they “loathed the manna.” “And the Lord sent fiery serpents among them, and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died.” So they were humbled, and besought Moses to help them.

—“These fiery serpents,”—so called either from their appearance or from the effects of their bite,—spread destruction and terror through the camp! Old and young, rich and poor, all suffered alike,—sorrow, pain, and death prevailed.

2. What a picture of that wider and more terrible desolation, occasioned by the bite of that great serpent the devil, who has spread his poison through the whole soul of every man, introducing sin, sorrow, pain, and universal death—a death succeeded by a life of eternal woe!

—This plague of Israel was partial; that which afflicts us is

universal; in every man "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint:" and in all peoples and nations it is the same. Guilt, condemnation, and wrath universally reign. By nature "we are the children of the wicked one,"—"of our father the devil,"—"who is the god of this world." (2 Cor. iv. 4.) "Under the curse,"—oh! who can deliver us?

II. THE APPARENT INSUFFICIENCY OF THE REMEDY.

1. When Moses prayed for the people, instead of removing the serpents, God commanded Moses "to make a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole, and it shall come to pass that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live."

—It required strong faith to do this, and many objections might have been made against it. Of what use could this image be? and was it not unlawful to make a brazen image and worship it (as the Israelites did afterwards, 2 Kings, xviii. 4). It seemed not only fruitless and absurd, but contrary to God's repeated command; so that Moses might well have hesitated; but he did not—but simply obeyed, "and made a serpent of brass, and put it on a pole."

2. Just so do men argue of our remedy.

"The Son of man lifted up" on the cross, and dying for sinners, appears to many an insufficient remedy for the sin of the world. Of what avail are the death and sufferings of an obscure Jew, crucified in Jerusalem 1,800 years ago? How can this sacrifice take away sin? Besides, does not God abhor human sacrifices? This must ever so appear to unbelief!

—Yet "as Moses lifted up the serpent," so we lift up Christ among the perishing sinners of this world. We assert that he was God and man in one Christ,—that being so, his precious blood avails to take away sin,—to secure pardon, peace, comfort, grace, salvation to all that believe in Him, and therefore we entreat, and exhort, and beseech men, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." "We preach Christ crucified." "Look unto me, and be ye saved," &c. (Isaiah xlv. 22.)

III. BEHOLD THE SUDDENNESS AND PERFECTION OF THE CURE.

1. How simply told!

"It came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived." We can imagine, all stages of the fiery disease; some just bitten, some in the severity of the

torture, some fast sinking into death,—little children, strong men, delicate women,—all writhing in torment ; but look, see, lift your half-closed eye,—behold yonder brazen serpent, and one glance availed—they lived ! In an instant passed from death to life.

2. Just so, and most accurately of our Great Remedy !

The blessing here typified is not sanctification, or only *a part* of salvation, it is *salvation itself* ! A man is lost, and he looks to Jesus and he is saved—as surely as the dying thief. In a moment—there must be some period of time when a penitent, broken-hearted sinner beholds Jesus by faith, and that moment saves him. The act of faith, pictured by “looking to Jesus,” saves and justifies,—so that if the man died the next moment he would be in heaven with Jesus. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” “All that believe are justified from all things.” (Acts xiii. 39.) “And there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. viii. 1, 2.) “He has passed from death unto life, and shall never die.” Could the cure of the dying Israelites have been more perfect ?

1. *Do you believe the desperate and deadly nature of sin, and your state of guilt before God ?* You will never seek or find Christ until you know this, feel it, lament it, and fear !

2. *Admitting the malady and its deadly consequences,* are you content with the only remedy ? Are you trusting to the finished work of Christ alone for your pardon and acceptance with God ? Mix aught with this, and you are lost ! There must be no merit of your own.

3. *Receiving, believing, and confessing all this,* does your life agree thereto ? Saved by Christ from guilt and punishment, has he saved you from the love, power, and practice of sin ? If not, distrust your faith—it is spurious, defective ! Christ is no Saviour to them who are not saved from their sins. (Acts iii. 26.)

XXI.

THE RUIN AND THE REMEDY.

Numbers xvii. 12, 13. *"And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish! Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord, shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?"*

THIS was the language of desperation, remorse, and enmity to God! Israel had deeply transgressed and hardened themselves in transgression, and a just God had repeatedly visited them in wrath. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and their company, had been swallowed up, and 250 men bearing impious fire had been consumed, and the surviving rebels said,—*"Ye have killed the people of the Lord."* When further punished, crushed, but not humbled, again they murmur against God, as in the text.

—Affecting description of the ravages of sin and death! Let us, with prayer for the Divine blessing, consider—

I. THE DEVASTATIONS OF DEATH.

II. THEIR CAUSE.

III. THEIR REMEDY.

I. THE DEVASTATIONS OF DEATH. A true picture of all mankind—*"Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish—we are consumed with dying!"*

1. Sad universal picture.

True in all ages, countries, climes. Death is universal and unavoidable: no exemption, old and young, strong and weak, rich and poor, tyrant and oppressor, the wise man and the fool—all die! Same phenomena, sickness, pain, suffering, decay—in all lands. *"Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, &c."* (Job xiv. 1, 2, &c.) *"All flesh is grass, &c."* (Isaiah xl. 6—8.) *"Mine age is departed, &c."* (Isaiah xxxviii. 12.) How many gone from among us, and we are hasting after them, and soon shall be with them.

2. And whither are they gone ?

Ask the philosopher, the sceptic, the Deist—they cannot tell you—they have no comfort for you—perhaps your departed ones are annihilated, or they wander in other bodies, or are absorbed in Deity ! Ah ! man without God's Word knows nothing of the future !

They are in the separate state—they have begun to be eternally happy or miserable—eternal woes or eternal bliss—a second death—oh ! terrible—the first death is sad, but what is the second ? “Where their worm never dies, &c.”

II. THE CAUSE OF THESE WIDE-SPREAD DESOLATIONS OF DEATH : again ask the philosopher, the philanthropist, the disbeliever in the Scripture account of it—Why all this misery, pain, death ? How do you reconcile it with a God of benevolence ? They are silent ! Our answer is one word—“SIN !”—“our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” (Isaiah lxiv. 6.)

1. This world is in a penal state.

A fact much overlooked. It so far resembles the future world of suffering, with this difference—*this* world is both penal and probationary, *that* is penal only. *But this world is a state of punishment*—we are born into it under the curse and wrath of God—and every pain, sorrow, grief, bodily, mental, spiritual, is a punishment for original sin, or the effect of actual sin. “We die, we perish, we all perish,” because we sin, we all sin ! Universal death proves universal sin ! because death is the penalty of sin ! (Romans v. 12.) Almost all men hasten death and shorten their lives by sin ! It peoples gaols and madhouses, and feeds the tomb. (Romans vi. 23.) The mortal wound—“sting of death is sin.” (1 Cor. xv. 56.) “Brings forth death.” (James i. 15.)

2. Alas, this too, people's hell !

—“The wicked turned into hell.” (Psalm ix. 17 ; Matt. xxiii. 33 ; 2 Peter ii. 4.) First death only dark portal to the second.

III. THE REMEDY for this wide-spread desolation of sin and death : it was that “very tabernacle” which these frightened, but desperate sinners dreaded ! There only was their refuge ; there the mercy-seat ; there the propitiation—the sacrificing priest, the altar, and a sin-forgiving God above it ! Yet they said, “Whosoever cometh near the tabernacle of the

Lord shall die!" And perhaps they were right—for as of the Gospel it typified, so the tabernacle was a means of life or death, according as it was approached—"of life unto life, or of death unto death." (2 Cor. ii. 16.) But there was no other refuge, no other salvation.

Now Christ is our true Tabernacle. (Heb. viii. 2.) "He hath put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Heb. ix. 26.) "He hath abolished death." (2 Tim. i. 10.) He has offered one sacrifice for sins. (Heb. x. 12.) He is our "Apostle and High Priest;" our living "Advocate with the Father." (1 John ii. 1.)

—*Here is the universal remedy*—Christ Jesus the Lord—He is "the tree, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations." (Rev. xxii. 2.) "The shadow of a great rock in a weary land." "He healeth broken hearts"—"wipes tears from sorrowing faces"—lights up the grave with joy—makes men "long to depart" that they may "be with him." By faith in Him his people rejoice in tribulation—count temptations "all joy"—heavy burdens are lightened, long troubles shortened and sweetened: and they have "a hope full of immortality." Well has he said, "Oh death, I will be thy plagues!" (Hosea xiii. 14.)

With what view do you regard Almighty God?—as terrible, revengeful, cruel, relentless? Do you read these attributes in the present miseries of the world? Do the promised miseries of another world confirm them? Does the language of the text suit you? Then it is because *you do not know God!* Conscious guilt and dread of punishment we have in common with devils "who believe and tremble;" but only repent, humble your proud hearts, lay low that unbelieving spirit, and seek mercy through the Son of his love, and then "you shall see the end of the Lord, that he is very pitiful and of tender mercy!" Some men "will treasure up wrath against the day of wrath"—but if you "flee from the wrath to come," and lay hold on the all-sufficient Saviour, you shall taste the sweetness of his mercy.

—Let all who know Him, and love Him, cleave unto Him in his tabernacle, his mercy-seat; they shall find his name "Love," and shall rejoice before Him.

XXII.

THE KING, THE MAN OF GOD, AND THE PROPHET.

1 Kings xiii. 26.—“*It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord : therefore the Lord hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake unto him.*”

THIS narrative involves some difficult questions :—all feel this ; and evil men are ready to scoff at the sacred story, and to question the wisdom and justice of God. It is not pretended that we can remove all such difficulties ; but it may be that some things may be explained, and many useful and practical lessons may be learned by a candid review of the facts of the case.

—God grant us humility and teachableness in the study of his holy Word. Here is—

I. AN IMPIOUS KING.

II. AN HYPOCRITICAL PROPHET.

III. A FALLEN MAN OF GOD.

I. Jeroboam proved himself on this occasion AN IMPIOUS KING.

—He had been selected of God to sever the ten tribes from the house of David for their sins. (Chap. xi. 26—40.) In the lifetime of Solomon, Jeroboam had fled into Egypt, and was recalled on the death of that king, and the division was effected under Rehoboam. So far well—Jeroboam obeyed ; he builds and prospers (xii. 25).

—Then began his sinful expediency—(26—33)—he did not propose false gods, but he set up images of the true. “The calves in Bethel” were intended to serve as substitutes for the Jerusalem temple.

—Jeroboam made a great feast on the occasion—and the Lord sent “a man of God out of Judah” to protest against this disobedient form of worship :—the man of God cries—the costly altar is rent in pieces—the impious king would seize the faithful prophet—and the outstretched hand is withered—on the prayer of the man of God it is restored. But there is no repentance in the king (ver. 33, 34). “Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, &c.” (xiv. 7—10). He lived, and prospered, and perished in his sin !

—Note—when for worldly expediency men act against their consciences, not even a miracle will convince them. “If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe though one rose from the dead.”

II. HERE IS AN HYPOCRITICAL OLD PROPHET:—a careful examination of his conduct will prove his hypocrisy.

1. Some points look favourable in him.

He is called “a prophet”—and so was Balaam—miraculous powers do not prove piety:—“We have prophesied in thy name, and cast out devils, &c.” (Matthew vii. 21—23.) The old prophet was hospitable—seemed to respect good men. When the man of God died, this prophet, who caused his death, mourned over him—“Alas, my brother!”—and showed some belief in his predictions, and a sentimental desire to be buried with him. So did Balaam say,—“Let me die the death of the righteous,” though he perished miserably, fighting against God!

2. But his whole conduct proved the hollowness of his faith, and his real disobedience.

—He dwelt in Bethel, the city of Israel’s idolatry, and was silent—“a dumb dog, &c.” Therefore a man of God was sent from JUDAH! His sons attended the false worship unreprieved. He knew the man of God was positively forbidden to return, yet he tempted him to do so—nay, he repeatedly “lied unto him!” When compelled (like Balaam’s ass) to warn the man of God, he showed no remorse, nor pity, nor repentance! He probably thought the danger remote, or doubted it altogether.

—Yet this man escaped immediate punishment! He deserved it chiefly of the three! But we know not his end! If he was spared, and let alone, and died in his sins, he was far more heavily punished than the man of God.

III. A FALLEN MAN OF GOD. That he was a man of God, and a true one, even the scanty materials before us prove. As the general tenour of the old prophet’s conduct proved him false, so the general tenour of the man of God’s conduct proved him true, though weak in the hour of temptation.

1. See the many evidences of his fidelity.

He came in obedience to Divine command—post of honour and danger! See, there he stands alone, helpless, unsupported, before a

king, a soldier and his officers, and great men—he beards the lion in his den—he opposes a powerful king in a favourite scheme, and in his full power and prosperity! Threatened—he stands firm—mediates with God for him who would have crushed him! When honoured and caressed, he resists the blandishments of a court, and refuses to eat bread—departs, having strictly fulfilled his mission, nobly, honourably.

But temptation assails him when he thought all danger was over. Weary, exhausted, and wondering it might be at God's dealings with him, he sat under a tree by the way-side. Perhaps this was his first error! Had he hurried back as on urgent business, and not tarried, his tempter had not overtaken him! Satan came in the garb of a prophet, a brother, a friend! (How often it is so with us!) He yielded and fell.

2. His fall, his sin! What was it?

It was DISOBEDIENCE! God had spoken to him—he knew it was true, for his own miracles had confirmed it, and he ought not to have listened to man, or prophet, or priest, whatever their pretensions, who contradicted God's word to him. Detect his weakness by comparing (ver. 8 and ver. 16).

—His sin was public and dangerous—his return stultified his message—sanctioned the idolatrous city, and the false prophet—he was a divinely-appointed messenger, and had he gone unpunished it would have tended to prove that the word of God in his lips was not true.

3. Hence his summary punishment.

It appears severe—DEATH! Open, miraculous, calculated to impress the country! There stood the lion and the ass, and there lay the corpse of the man of God! What a solemn testimony! What an awakening judgment—yet MERCY in it to all!

—*To the man of God*—he was taken to his rest—death was gain to him—he departed under a cloud—God's honour and the Church's good required an exemplary temporal punishment—but with him—“the day of his death was better than the day of his birth.”

—*To the old prophet*—if anything could awaken him from his coldness, unfaithfulness, and hypocrisy, surely this would!

—*To Jeroboam and the people of Israel*—to his ungodly courtiers—his expediency-counsellors, to all—what a lesson! God's witness against a spurious idolatry!

What solemn practical lessons to us all! This man of God, though dead, yet speaketh! And what does he say?

1. *Behold the true nature of SIN* : it is **DISOBEDIENCE**. "It is the man of God who was **DISOBEDIENT**!" That is sin—the essence of it—no matter what the command is, positive or negative, about a great thing or a little one, disobedience is the sin! (1 Sam. xv. 22.)

2. *Behold the dreadful consequences of sin*! **DEATH**! not always so immediate, and remarkable, but *always*—"the wages of sin is death!"

3. *The severity with which God visits sin in his people in this world*! See Jacob, the supplanter—all his life deceived and tormented by his children! See David, though pardoned and accepted, chastened in his house unto the day of his death: and Solomon, in his son: and others.

4. *The need and blessedness of a Saviour*! A refuge from all the terrible consequences of sin in this world and the next. Pardoned and justified in Him, and walking with God in Christ, we cheerfully bear his loving chastisements here, knowing it is all in mercy, and looking to the end, the happy end, we know it must work "that appointed end."

XXIII.

EFFECTS OF SAVING GRACE.

Titus ii 11, 12. "*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.*"

THE apostle had been inculcating all moral duties, personal and social (ver. 1—10)—"that they might adorn the doctrine, &c." (ver. 10). But in the text he shows, not only that the doctrines of grace inculcate holiness of life, but that grace is a principle in the heart which *secures it*.

—May the Holy Spirit enlighten and teach us!

I. THE PRINCIPLE OF WHICH THE APOSTLE SPEAKS—**SAVING GRACE**.

II. THE EFFECTS HE ATTRIBUTES TO IT—**sanctifying, &c.**

III. THE TESTIMONY THUS AFFORDED TO ALL MEN.

I. THE PRINCIPLE SPOKEN OF: "the grace of God that bringeth salvation:" that is saving, effectual grace.

1. This is to be distinguished from the grace which does not bring salvation.

—*All things are of grace*—every temporal blessing—life, and health, and food, and raiment: kind friends, domestic mercies, social happiness, natural gifts, talents, powers—all this is grace, but not saving grace.

—*So also in a higher sense, religious advantages are the gift of grace.* The Word of God, the Sabbath-day, the preached Gospel, the holy sacraments, the movements of conscience, religious education, all religious light and knowledge—these are properly called "the means of grace:" but they are not necessarily grace itself, nor do they necessarily bring salvation, for hundreds live and die in the midst of them and perish—they are not, therefore, "the grace of God which bringeth salvation."

2. That alone is saving grace: effectual to salvation.

—The grace of God, which convinces of sin—works true sorrow and repentance in the heart—leads to Jesus, enables us to believe in Him—justifies, sanctifies, supports, gives the spirit of adoption, and keeps us to the end—that is the grace here spoken of.

II. OF THIS ONLY CAN IT BE SAID, "THAT IT TEACHES US TO DENY UNGODLINESS AND WORLDLY LUSTS," &c.

1. Observe the force of the word "teaches us."

It is not merely "to inculcate" as a lesson, to enforce as a dogma, but to educate, train, discipline, nurture, bring up,—to influence as a principle, to mould—form the character.

2. Its two-fold influence.

(a) "*To deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.*" The grace of God in the heart expels impiety, and crucifies the flesh. Grace and ungodliness cannot dwell together—it is impossible.—darkness must flee when light comes. Ungodliness totally disappears,—is denied, repudiated; and carnal, worldly, vain, sensual desires are mortified, put to the torture—daily subdued.

(b) *Positively*,—grace, saving grace in the heart, that which has brought salvation there, "teaches to live"—to live to God, teaches, constrains, ennobles, imparts holy life, forms it in us,—*soberly*,

seriously, sensibly, rationally,—as opposed to frivolity and vanity,—*righteously*, honestly, justly, truly,—and *godly*, piously, spiritually, after a heavenly fashion,—“our conversation in heaven,” &c. (Philip. iii. 20.) “In this present world,”—in it—not going out of it, but moving about in all its busy scenes thus godly, uprightly. “All holy conversation and godliness.” (2 Pet. iii. 11.)

—This is the necessary, uniform effect of saving grace, without any exception! It cannot be otherwise,—it is a moral necessity,—*where* grace brings salvation—*there* it teaches these holy lessons, with power and Divine influence.

III. THUS THE EVIDENCES OF GRACE ARE APPARENT,—“they appear to all men.”

The unconverted world are incapable of perceiving or understanding the principle of grace, or the work of the Spirit,—“Whom the world cannot receive, for it seeth Him not, neither knoweth,” &c.

—The carnal mind, “the natural man receiveth not,” &c. (1 Cor. ii. 14.) They can as easily see the wind,—“The wind bloweth where it listeth,” &c. (John iii. 8.) Piety is to them cant and hypocrisy.

—But they can see and understand the fruits of the Spirit. And when the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, works in us all holiness of heart and life, the world sees it and must appreciate it. When drunkards become sober,—thieves honest—impure holy,—passionate men gentle,—when these effects of grace follow, then “the grace of God appears to all men,” and they see it, and may be led to glorify God. “They see your good works, and glorify your Father,” &c. (Matt. v. 16.)

1. *Here is warning to all the unholy, inconsistent, who think they have grace. Beware! That grace which does not teach you holiness, will never bring you salvation! it will bring you delusion and destruction. “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”*

2. *Let the weak and sincere take comfort. The grace of God is freely given to them that ask,—“it is sufficient grace,”—it brings salvation,—and it teaches holiness,—therefore trust to it, believe, hope, wait, and “God will supply all your need.”*

3. *Let all beware, lest the inconsistencies, follies, fanaticism, and ungodliness of men calling themselves religious, tempt them to think lightly of*

the grace of God! Nothing can make any man holy, pious, virtuous, godly, but the saving grace of God. To despise grace, is almost to sin against the Holy Ghost! Let all seek salvation, the pardon of their sins through the blood of Christ; and when they have salvation, they will find holiness and newness of life!

XXIV.

PRAYER A TEST OF CHARACTER.

Acts ix. 11. "*For, behold, he prayeth.*"

WHEN Saul of Tarsus had been converted by the Lord himself appearing to him in the way, and had been led blind and helpless into Damascus, Ananias, a pious disciple of Christ, was directed to go and visit him, bearing a message from heaven to him. Ananias was afraid, doubting the sincerity of the change, when the Lord silenced his fears by urging this evidence of conversion—"Behold, he prayeth." Long afterwards St. Paul declared that his conversion was to be "a pattern to all believers," &c. (1 Tim. i. 16.) We may therefore generalize this Divine assertion, and consider—

I. THE TRUE NATURE OF PRAYER.

II. THAT SUCH PRAYER IS AN EVIDENCE OF CONVERSION.

III. THAT IT IS ALSO A TEST OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS.

I. WHAT THEN IS PRAYER? What its true nature?

1. It is something more than the repetition of forms, however good and scriptural.

This is evident from St. Paul's case. He had been brought up a strict Pharisee, he had therefore diligently frequented the temple,—had no doubt said prayers three times, perhaps seven times a day—good prayers, David's psalms and hymns, and other inspired forms,—but he had never prayed till now! "Behold, he prayeth!" He had said his prayers, but not prayed! Oh the difference! *The*

prayer of the formalist,—the prayer of the self-righteous,—vain repetitions,—duties performed—services gone through. These are not prayer!

2. What then is prayer?

It is the voice of the heart,—the utterance of real desire—the expression of feeling—the opening of the inner man to God! It is intellectual—spiritual.

—*It is the cry of penitence!* “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

It is confession, penitential, sorrowful, the voice of a broken spirit.

—*It is the language of want—necessity—poverty.*

—*It is the utterance of faith!* There can be no prayer without faith. Faith in Christ. Prayer must be made to Christ, and through Christ,—“Looking to Jesus.”

The mode and manner of heartfelt prayer, indifferent—it may be through a form, or extempore—long or short, vehement and impassioned, or calm and tranquil,—it may be offered anywhere and everywhere. It may be desire too strong for words,—“there are groans which cannot be uttered.” (Romans viii. 26.) So the Church,—“the desires and petitions of thy servants.” “Those who thought upon his name.” (Mal. iii. 16.) It is the breath of the Spirit in our souls (Romans viii. 26) “helping our infirmities.”

II. SUCH PRAYER IS AN EVIDENCE OF CONVERSION.

1. The unconverted live without prayer,—

—worse than the cattle, for “the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib, but my people do not consider,” &c. (Isaiah i.) How frightful that any should lie down or rise up without prayer; they have no God—no souls! Many others say their prayers with superstitious constancy! I have heard of the boast of a notorious drunkard—that he always said his prayers! Such “prayer is an abomination unto the Lord.” (Ezek. xiv. 1—3.)

2. But when the sinner is truly awakened, convinced, converted, prayer is his first utterance!

Just as with a new-born babe a cry is the first evidence of life—a cry for food!—so a new-born soul “desires the sincere milk of the Word.” (1 Peter ii. 2.) He cries for mercy, pardon, help. He flies instinctively to the throne of grace. He is full of need, full of sorrow, full of helplessness, “and to whom shall he go?” “Behold, he prayeth!”

3. So throughout his subsequent spiritual course, prayer is at once the life of the soul and the evidence of life.

—*It is his comfort in sorrow.* As Hezekiah. (Isaiah xxxvii. 14.) As David in many Psalms (see xxxi. and lxii.),—"all my fresh springs are in thee."

—*It is a guide in difficulties,*—"Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" "I will instruct thee and teach thee," &c. "A voice behind thee, saying, This is the way," &c.

—*It is his pleasant occupation in calm and prosperous moments.* See how David sat before the Lord, meditating on all his mercies, goodness, &c. There was retrospect, circumspect, and prospect,—and all occupied with the Lord's goodness. "Who am I?" &c.

—*Prayer not an isolated or occasional act, but a habit of soul.* Hence the expressions, "Continue instant in prayer," "Pray to God always," "Pray without ceasing," "In everything give thanks," "all the day long," "seven times a-day." Not always on knees, not for ever occupied in formal devotion, but breathing the spirit of prayer.

III. THUS PRAYER IS ALSO A TEST OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS; it is the metre, the barometer of the soul,—from the first terrified cry for mercy to the last calm expression of love on the death-bed, prayer is our test.

WHAT we are in prayer, alone with God, THAT we are in his sight! Stripped of all outward influences, excitement, sympathy, we enter our chamber, and shut the door, "and PRAY." What that prayer is, *that* we are! Cold, dead, formal? with much effort, distaste, absence of heart?—that will show our spiritual condition: there will be corresponding inconsistency, worldliness, deadness in our conduct and character.

When prayer is our delight, our earnest effort and practice, though not always with equal warmth, but steady, constant, diligent, persevering, waiting upon God,—there will be corresponding energy, vitality, devotedness in our lives. All declensions from God begin in prayer, or in neglect of it; all true revivals must begin there too.

—*This subject ought to make us all think deeply and seriously.* What am I in the sight of God? What when alone with Him? Do I seek solitude, meditation, prayer? What is God then to me?

—*Do I live without prayer?* Oh! most perilous condition! God have mercy on my soul, and teach me to pray!

—*Do I pray only formally?* Oh God! awaken my soul, and teach me to pray from the heart, the soul, the understanding.

—*Is prayer my habit, my life?* Let me abound more and more!

XXV.

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS.

Zech. iv. 10. "*For who hath despised the day of small things ?*"

ZECHARIAH, an evangelical prophet, was sent specially to cheer and comfort God's people in trouble. They were despised, and in manifold afflictions were rebuilding their city and temple. Enemies scorned and timid friends discouraged them. The prophet taught them it was "not by might, nor by power, but by God's Spirit," that they must succeed. He assured them that, as Zerubbabel had laid the foundation, he should lay "the headstone" triumphantly. "For who?"—where is he "who hath despised the day of small things?"

—The importance of small things, and the sin and danger of despising them, may be illustrated—

I. IN THE WORKS AND WAYS OF GOD HIMSELF,—FOR OUR INSTRUCTION.

II. IN THE OPERATIONS OF SIN,—FOR OUR WARNING.

III. IN THE WORK OF GRACE IN THE HEART,—FOR OUR CONSOLATION !

I. 1. See it in Creation.

The wide river—broad expanse—bears a navy on its deep waters—once a little stream, a rill, a drop ! Or stately oak, timber, shade—once a little acorn. Man—the intellectual, mighty, noble—once a little babe, helpless on its mother's lap. All nature illustrates the small beginnings, which produce vast results.

2. See it in Providence—in nations and peoples, and God's dealings with them.

The whole race from one man—again from Noah. The indestructible nation of Israel—from "one man, and he as good as dead !" (Heb. xi. 12.) Stupendous events on trifling incidents. In individuals,—who cannot see in his own history how the whole cast of his life has again and again been moulded by the veriest trifle ? A word, a look, an accidental meeting has fixed our earthly destiny.

3. Most of all in Christianity and its story.

"The day of small things" has been the source of its universal development! See the babe in Bethlehem!—the helpless man on the cross!—the timid eleven in the upper chamber, with closed doors for fear of the Jews!—or the whole twelve cast into prison as soon as they opened their lips! Who would have discovered the germs of the world-wide Christianity which came forth from those beginnings? It is the very nature of this kingdom,—“the grain of mustard seed,” &c. (Matt. xiii. 31, 33.)

This is for our INSTRUCTION,—teaching us not to despise the day of small things.

II. SEE THE SAME PRINCIPLE IN THE NATURE AND PROGRESS OF SIN. Sin never takes possession of the whole heart at once; it is a slow and gradual progress,—seed deposited,—developes,—spreads,—prevails. (James i. 15.) “Lust, when it has conceived, bringeth forth sin,” &c.

—*See that miserable drunkard*,—loathsome, degraded, ruined his family,—poverty, shame, &c. ! He was not always so ! It was the first glass and the second, and the friendly cup, and the harmless joke—the jovial party,—but it grew and grew, until there he is !

—*Here is a sordid miser*,—beggars himself to save !—despicable ! Once a thrifty tradesman, but love of money got hold of him, and he began to hoard a little, and now look at him and learn !

—*Or the wretched sensualist*,—“Whose god is his belly, his glory in his shame,”—“his end destruction.” (Philip. iii. 19.) He was once a rosy, high-spirited lad, but by little and little, &c.

—*Or, worst of all, see that degraded woman*,—a drunken outcast,—hear her profane brawlings in the streets,—lost to shame,—a wretched prostitute ! She was once a sweet little prattling child—a father's pride and her mother's darling. She was a pure, unsullied girl—sportive and innocent,—but it was a thought—a desire,—it was vanity, love of dress, of admiration,—she listened and fell—secretly for long—but worse and worse—till behold the frightful ruin !

Oh, take WARNING ! It is by little and little we fall ! Never allow an impure desire, and you will never be an adulterer ! Never covet other people's goods, and you will never steal ! Beware of little sins—of wounding conscience,—“If sinners entice thee, consent thou not.”

—Oh that the young would think on these things ! Oh that they could know the misery they will thus escape in old age.

III. ILLUSTRATE THIS PRINCIPLE BY THE WORK OF GRACE IN OUR HEARTS, FOR OUR CONSOLATION.

—*See the aged, mature Christian*,—"the shock of corn, fully ripe"—grey hairs, venerable. See the piety which glows in his face, lighted up with hope, and joy, and peace,—he is about to "depart," and he is ready and waiting—"has fought the good fight," &c. We look on with reverence and love,—we wonder how we can be like that? Think you that came all at once? was it the work of a day—of an hour? No! it was indeed once only a sigh, or a tear, or a thought, or a friendly word casually dropped; it was once "a day of small things" with that man,—but by little and little, gradually, patiently, continuously "growing in grace,—the light shining more and more,"—"the perfect day is about to break." The holiest, wisest, most advanced, heavenly-minded believer began with "a day of small things." What CONSOLATION here for all.

1. Let not those with whom religion is yet a day of small things be discouraged.

You may have had many failures, much disappointment—tempted to think all is vain! But courage! You seek one who "will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." (Isaiah xlii. 3.) One who is the good Shepherd, "carrying the lambs in his bosom, gently leading" the feeble. (Isaiah xl. 11.) Don't despise the little spark, He will fan it into a flame. The seed is small—"sow it, even in tears, you shall reap in joy." (Ps. cxxvi. 5.) "Quench not the Spirit." (1 Thess. v. 19.) Let none tempt you "to despise the day of small things."

2. Let not such persons rest contented:

—it must not be always a day of small things—these are beginnings, seeds, fountains, the "little fire" which is to kindle much love. Some may deceive themselves thus, and be content to have it so! and thus may fall into a snare.

3. Let the most advanced Christian esteem his present attainments as a day of small things, and press on to greater.

Your present knowledge, love, grace, peace, success in conflict, not to be despised—but what are they compared with what lies before you even *here*, and what *hereafter*? If St. Paul "counted not himself to have attained," how we? How limited your knowledge? "Then shall you know even as also you are known!" (1 Cor. xiii. 12.) How often perplexed! "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter!" (John xiii. 7.) How dim

your sight! "Through a glass, darkly"—"Then face to face."
How many corruptions and much indwelling sin! Then none—
for you shall be "like him!"

"Thou shalt see greater things than these."

The present "day of small things" shall infallibly lead to these
great ones!

XXVI.

GOD'S UNLIMITED GIFT.

Romans viii. 32. "*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up
for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*"

ST. PAUL enunciating the strongest consolations and the most wonderful
promises of Revelation. (Ver. 1.) The entire forgiveness of sins, and
perfect justification: the work of the Spirit—election—adoption—final
perseverance and glorification. He anticipates that faith might be
staggered at the greatness of the promises. "What shall we then say to
these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" Doubt not
because of the richness of his grace—"He has given us his Son"—He
has given us the greatest and best thing—"How shall he not with him
also freely give us all things?" May the Holy Spirit open these truths
to our souls!

I. THE GREAT FACT HERE RECORDED.

II. THE INFERENCE WHICH THE APOSTLE DRAWS FROM IT.

I. Observe the Gospel is a GREAT FACT; a series of facts; not a simple
scheme of doctrines, theories, dogmas, or commandments. The great
fact here recorded is, "that God spared not his own Son, but delivered
him up for us all." Where observe—

1. The original cause of this great event:

God himself—the holy, the offended, the just Judge. He is not
the inexorable, cruel, vindictive Deity which some have drawn Him,
but one who loved the guilty—pitied the lost—and seeing no other
way by which justice and mercy could meet in the salvation of man,

—He gave, He sent, his own Son to the rescue. He could not “be just,” and yet “justify the ungodly,” without some ransom, some redemption.

2. Therefore He spared not his own Son—

—that is, He withheld Him not. Just as Abraham did, the type of this mercy. “Because thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.” (Genesis xxii. 16.) Not like the rich man, “who spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd.” (2 Sam. xii. 4.) He was heaven’s brightest gem—the Son of his love, his only begotten Son—“the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person”—“all the angels of God worshipped him.” Yet He spared Him not! but—

3. “Delivered him up for us all.”

Where note the meaning of the word—“to deliver up into the hands of justice that the law might take its course”—as a criminal—“he was numbered with the transgressors”—“the just for the unjust,”—condemned, though innocent. *Because He was our substitute*—“for us,” in our place and stead. “The Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah liii.) “By his stripes we are healed” —“He was made SIN for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Cor. v. 21.) More complete *substitution* could not be expressed—take away *substitution*—the *fact*, that Christ the good was punished, and suffered and died in the place of us, the bad—and the whole Gospel is overthrown. “He bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” (1 Peter ii. 24.)

II. THE INFERENCE WHICH THE APOSTLE DRAWS FROM THIS GREAT FACT—“how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

1. It is a plain logical conclusion.

God has given you his Son—his greatest, his best gift, He can give no greater: He has nothing greater—will He then, can He withhold any less thing from you? All else is nothing compared with this.

2. But here is further a moral necessity: it is impossible that it can be otherwise.

“How shall he not?” How is it possible? It must be so! Why? Because of the nature of the gift itself! What is Christ? Not only the Son of God, equal with God—God manifest in the flesh—not only personally all this and more—but as Messiah possessing in himself all the fulness of God for us! Therefore in giving Christ,

the act of giving Christ gives us all things ! “ All things are yours, because ye are Christ's, &c.” (1 Cor. iii. 21—23.) You have the casket and all the jewels in it—the estate, with all the timber, minerals, buildings, rights belonging to it. So that in giving his Son, God has actually given us all things, and nothing more is needed.

3. Look then, at the fulness, sufficiency of this gift in the light of this argument ! Here is “ a supply for all your need.”

—*Are you guilty ?* Does conscience reproach ? Sin a burden ?

—Here is atonement, pardon, peace.

—*Are you burdened with remaining corruptions ?* There is strength, grace, sufficiency in Christ, to be drawn out of Him by the Spirit for your help.

—*Do temptations, trials, sorrows, woes depress ?* Here is a Saviour “ touched with a feeling of your infirmities, &c.,” “ able to save to the uttermost.”

—*Have you lost your way ?* Here is an infallible Guide.

—*Are you destitute of graces ?* No love, faith, hope, peace, joy, patience ? All seem to fail. Then seek them in Christ ! Laid up in Him for you !

—And all this, and all else you can want or wish for, is given in and with Christ—“ FREELY ”—of free grace and mercy, for no goodness of yours—“ how shall he not,” in Christ, and “ with ” Christ, and through Christ, “ freely give you all things ! ”

One practical thought :—If God has thus freely given you all things in Christ, should not you also give yourself to God ? What should you withhold from Him who has bought you at so great a price ? Your time, talents, gifts, property, yea life itself, are all his ! “ I beseech you therefore . . . present your bodies a living sacrifice, &c.” (Rom. xii. 1.)

XXVII.

BAPTISM AND PREACHING.

1 Corinthians i. 17. "*For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel : not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be of none effect.*"

DIVISIONS, party spirit, and an undue preference for particular ministers, have been found in the Church from the beginning. These evils specially prevailed among the Christians at Corinth. St. Paul abstained from administering the sacrament of baptism, through the fear that it might be said "that he baptized in his own name." These circumstances led him to make the general declaration of the text: "For Christ sent me not."

The right exposition of this weighty truth calls for spiritual wisdom and discernment. Let us seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit !

- I. ST. PAUL TRACES HIS MISSION TO CHRIST HIMSELF—"for Christ sent me."
- II. ST. PAUL DESCRIBES HIS MISSION NEGATIVELY: "*Christ sent me not to baptize.*"
- III. HE DESCRIBES HIS MISSION POSITIVELY: "*Christ sent me to preach the Gospel.*"
- IV. A PECULIARITY IN HIS MODE OF DELIVERING HIS MESSAGE: "*He preached the Gospel,*" but "*not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.*"
- I. ST. PAUL TRACES HIS MISSION TO CHRIST HIMSELF—"FOR CHRIST SENT ME."

—*This was true of all the apostles*, as their very name intimates. They were all sent of God, and received their commission from Christ himself.

—*The peculiarity of St. Paul's mission* is familiar to all. (Acts xxvi. 16—18.)

—*But every faithful pastor and evangelist is as truly and certainly "sent of Christ."*

—Many have been sent of man, and commissioned by visible Churches, who were not sent of God : nor can any form of ordination claim exclusive efficacy.

—Some have been manifestly sent of God and commissioned by Christ, who have never been authorized or sent by the Church. (Acts viii. 4, and xi. 19, 21.)

—Yet ecclesiastical order is reverently to be observed, and, in our judgment, the episcopal form of ordination, as used in our own Church, is that most in harmony with God's Word.

—But neither the Reformers, nor their most illustrious successors, ever held or taught that no other form of ordination was valid.

—Our Church is chiefly anxious that those whom she calls to the holy ministry "should be moved by the Holy Ghost to take this office upon them."

II. ST. PAUL DESCRIBES HIS MISSION NEGATIVELY: "CHRIST SENT ME NOT TO BAPTIZE."

—*This is not a positive or unqualified negation.* He himself says (ver 14)—"I baptized Crispus and Gaius," and also (ver. 16), "the household of Stephanus." Sometimes both he and the rest of the apostles commanded other persons to administer baptism ; yet they often administered that sacrament themselves. (Acts x. 48 ; viii. 38.) So also our Lord. (John iv. 2.)

—*Neither can he mean that baptism is no necessary part of the Christian system ;* nor that it can be safely neglected. It was identical with that mission itself : "baptizing them, &c." (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20), and it was taught by the apostles. (Acts ii. 38 ; viii. 12, &c.)

—*It must, therefore, have a comparative sense, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel :"* that is, having received a commission "to preach the Gospel to every creature," and also "to baptize" them that believed, the apostle esteemed the former more honourable, more important, and pregnant with more eventful consequences than the latter : it is impossible, honestly, to put a weaker sense than this upon his words.

III. HE DESCRIBES HIS MISSION POSITIVELY: "*Christ sent me to preach the Gospel.*"

—*Here is the message with which he was charged—"THE GOSPEL,"* or "*the cross of Christ,*" or "*the preaching of the Cross*" (ver. 18),

that Revelation of God's love in Christ Jesus, which he has made known to the world in the Gospel dispensation. "God manifest in the flesh"—his person, his work, his salvation: man's ruin and recovery—his pardon and sanctification, all in Christ, and all out of Christ, this is—THE GOSPEL!

—*The method by which he was to communicate it: by preaching.* This form of making known the truth is peculiar to this dispensation. No provision was made for preaching under the Mosaic system—altars, sacrifices, oblations, atoning and interceding priests, and the reading of the law, were prescribed, but preaching formed no part of the temple service!

—Under the Gospel there is no provision made for temple services, or for sacerdotal offices; these all ended in Christ. The substitute is *preaching the Gospel*—this is a *Divine ordinance* for the *conversion of sinners* and the *edification of saints*.

—*It is his living, oral Word*; and, if consistent with his written Word, is of Divine efficacy: the Holy Ghost accompanying it as in the apostles' days.

IV. A PECULIARITY IN HIS MODE OF DELIVERING HIS MESSAGE: "*He preached the Gospel,*" but "*not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.*"

1. Here again his negation cannot be positive, but comparative.

When he discards "the wisdom of words," or "the excellency of speech or of wisdom" (ii. 1), or "enticing words of man's wisdom" (ver. 4), he cannot mean to applaud folly and ignorance—to consecrate dulness, or ascribe special efficacy to vulgarity—this is contrary to his own practice. St. Paul himself was eloquent, forcible, argumentative, impassioned, indeed a singularly-gifted writer and speaker. The highest talents, powers, gifts, should be consecrated to this work.

2. His negation is intended to protect the simplicity of the message itself:—

—if the truth be obscured, overlaid, or concealed by man's gifts and personal powers then they become carnal and mischievous. When they cease to be subordinate, and subservient to the fuller development of truth, they are to be condemned.

3. His negation is intended to show where the efficient power lies:

As in chap. ii. 1—5, "The demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Eloquence could not convert souls, yet it might be used—

he would not discard human gifts, but he would not trust in them ; nor could they avail anything of themselves.

—*The idolatry of talent, much to be deprecated.*

—*We have been often warned of the danger of abusing the Holy Sacraments, have we considered the danger of slighting the Divine ordinance of preaching ?*

—*The peril of attending upon a faithful ministry ! to hear and not to feel, nor to obey ; to listen for years to warnings without alarm, to invitations without acceptance—to live on in the world, or in sin, or in indifference, how lamentable, dangerous !*

—*Oh that sinners would hear, consider, and turn to God !*

—*Let all true Christians regard the preaching of the Gospel as a Divine ordinance : let them humbly seek to profit, to be edified, and instructed in righteousness—let them receive it as a gift of God. Let them cease from man, and expect a message from God in it ; “ receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save their souls.”*

XXVIII.

THE SAMENESS OF CHRIST.

Hebrews xiii. 8. “ *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever !* ”

THE introduction of these words abrupt, and their position isolated : no immediate connexion with that which precedes or follows. The faith and blessed end of their devoted pastors had been referred to, and their example commended, and as if by a sudden inspiration, the apostle exclaims,—“ Jesus Christ—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ! ”

A grand and lonely object to contemplate—as the pyramid in the desert, the oak in the forest, as a mountain-peak rising out of the plain—“ JESUS CHRIST,”—noble theme,—his eternal sameness—“ Yesterday, —to-day,—for ever ! ” Oh ! for the eye of faith, the heart of love, worthily to “ look unto Jesus.”

I. THE MUTABILITY OF ALL EARTHLY THINGS.

II. THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

I. THE MUTABILITY OF ALL EARTHLY THINGS.

1. Suggested by the terms of the text.

—"YESTERDAY"—where is it? what is it? whither may we pursue it? It is gone for ever, into the abyss of the past—as much so as the yesterday of 500 years since! How near it seems!—how fresh our recollection of it—warm our memory! But cannot recal it, supply its deficiencies, retract its faults!

—"TO-DAY"—What is this? it is *now*, this moment, as we speak:—but see, it flies, eludes our grasp. Stop not, stay not. We cannot catch it as it passes—ere we say "here it is," it is gone, and for ever.

And TO-MORROW—alas so near to us, yet never comes. I think what I shall be, and do to-morrow—and I lay me down to sleep, and I awake, and it is gone! it is *to-day*! Still is the morrow future, onward, onward perpetual succession—such is life—perpetual change—hurrying on towards eternity!

2. Mutability is inscribed on all around us.

—*We see it in every one we meet*: how changed, we think! What a few weeks, months, or years can do! Men change in their opinions, feelings, modes of living—alas, too often in their friendships, loves, and hates! Friends become our foes, and foes our friends.

—*We see it in the material world around us*. We visit the haunts of our childhood, and search for the familiar cottage, the well-remembered foot-path and style, the brake and briar—alas, alas, it is all changed! Old faces greet us no more—none recognize us—"his place shall know him no more!"

—*We see it in ourselves*: the lapse of time tells upon us—our step is not so firm and active—our eye is not so bright—our spirit is not so elastic—grey hairs are upon our heads—the weight of years presses heavily on some of us.

—*Even in our spiritual course*: mutability a characteristic; advance there must be, growth, increase, or life may be doubted—yet that growth is not always equal and even, but by fits and starts, though in spite of fluctuation of feeling and experience. A steady hand supports and strengthens, or we faint and fall!

—Such is life, within, without, around, on all we see and hear and know. *Mutability* is written—"He continueth not in one stay." Life is a tale that is told—a dream when one awaketh. "Swifter

than a weaver's shuttle," as clouds chase each other in the wintry sky! Oh for something that *abideth*! And here it is!

II. "JESUS CHRIST THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TO-DAY, AND FOR EVER."

1. This is a peculiar attribute of Deity, and of Deity alone!

—"I am, that I am"—"I am, hath sent me unto you." (Exodus iii. 13—15; Psalm cii. 11, 12, and 25, 27.) Quoted chap. i. 12: "Thou art the same, &c." Language constantly applied to Christ by himself and others. "Before Abraham was, I am"—(John viii. 58)—"made himself God!" "The Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending." (Rev. i. 8.) "Whose goings forth are from everlasting, &c." (Micah v. 2.) Therefore Jesus Christ is God! "Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." (Chap. i. 8.)

2. See this in the Son of God: the eternal sameness of Jesus! *What He was, He is, and ever must be.*

- (a) *His tender compassion in his loving works*: beside the bier of the widowed mother. The sisters at Bethany. His compassion for the multitudes. His love for his people—"brother, sister, mother." For strangers—Syrophenician woman—His weeping over Jerusalem, —the universal healer! *What He was—HE IS!*
- (b) *His gracious declarations as the Gospel herald*,—"to bind up broken-hearted," &c. . . . "I am the way, the truth," &c. . . . "God so loved the world," &c. . . . "Come unto me, all ye weary," &c. . . . "Whoever cometh shall not be cast out," &c. . . . *That He is!*
- (c) *His pity in showing mercy and forgiving sin*. The penitent woman—"Thy sins are forgiven thee," &c. . . . "Jesus receiveth sinners and eateth with them," &c. . . . The woman taken in adultery. . . . He saves the sinking Peter, and restores him when fallen. Prays for his murderers, and cheers the doubting Thomas. *What He was—He is—"THE SAME!"*
- (d) *His solemn warnings*,—denounced sin, unbelief, hypocrisy,—"how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt. xxiii. 14 and 32, 33.) The unprofitable servant. . . . The barren fig-tree. . . . Foolish virgins. . . . "The fire which is never quenched," &c. *What He was—He is!*
- (e) *And what He is, He will be, when He comes again!* Same for ever! Same love, faithfulness, pity, truth,—to judge his enemies—"Depart, ye cursed," &c.,—to receive his friends—"Come, ye blessed of my Father," &c.

What abundant consolation is here for those who love their Saviour ! His love is unchangeable ! Amidst all that is fickle, changing, uncertain, or even treacherous, let us look to the unchangeable Saviour ! "He abideth faithful," &c. "He is not a man that he should lie," &c. What trust may we repose in Him ! In sorrow, trouble, need, distress, "My presence shall go with you." In every varied scene of life.

—But what if this Saviour is not your Saviour ? Where can you look for the pardon of all that is past ? In what is your present confidence ? and where is your future ? Oh ! think of these things, creature of time, thou child of a moment ! Cease from the baseless, shifting, perishing things of this fickle world, and lay hold on Christ, and then nothing can move you in life, in death, or in eternity !

XXIX.

A SERIOUS CALL.

Micah ii. 10. *"Arise ye and depart, for this is not your rest ; because it is polluted, it shall destroy you even with a sore destruction."*

SOME truths applicable only to particular persons, at particular times, and in peculiar seasons : some are confined to one or other of the three great dispensations,—Patriarchal, Mosaic, or Christian,—but many, like those contained in the text, are always applicable at all times and in all circumstances. May they at this time be written on our hearts and consciences by the Holy Spirit !

I. THE IMPORT OF THE EXHORTATION.

II. THE URGENT CONSIDERATIONS BY WHICH IT IS ENFORCED.

I. THE IMPORT OF THE EXHORTATION.

I. 1. This exhortation, or the spirit of it, may be traced from the moment Adam became an exile in a fallen world unto this day.

—Hear the voice of God to Abraham, Genesis xii. 1—3 : "Get

thee out of thy country, &c." See the spirit of it carried out in the lives of the Patriarchs, Hebrews xi. 13, 14, 16, 24—26 : "Showed plainly that they sought a country"—"a better country, a heavenly." Consider similar addresses in the prophets, corroborated by the apostles. Isaiah lii. 11 : "Depart ye—go out from thence ;" *cum* 2 Cor. vi. 14—18 : "Be ye not unequally yoked, &c." Our Lord himself taught the same truths. Matt. x. 32, 33, 37—39 ; and xvi. 24—26 : "Take up his cross, &c." And by his Spirit in Rev. xviii. 4 : "Come out of her, my people." The language of the Spirit to the people of God in all ages.

2. What is the import of it ?

—That we are to go out of the world ? live as monks and hermits, in cells, caves, dens ? Certainly not !

(a) *Yet we are to arise and depart from the world.*

—To depart from its sinful customs, guilty pleasures, vain amusements, dissipation, "poms and vanities."

—*To depart from it in heart*—not to love it—"Love not the world, neither the things of the world," &c. (1 John ii. 15.)

—*To live above it*—to be in it, but not of it ; "to use it, but not abuse it." (1 Cor. vii. 31.)

(b) *To set out towards another world—a better : depart from one for the other.*

—*To seek present rest, treasure, happiness, all in Christ.* "Come unto me, &c., and find rest to your soul," "my sons and daughters."

—*To glory everlasting.* "Ask your way Zionward"—take the pilgrim's staff, wayfaring man, "journeying to a land which God has spoken of." "Set your affections on things above, &c."

II. THE URGENT CONSIDERATIONS BY WHICH THE EXHORTATION IS ENFORCED.

1. Marked by the abrupt, bold style of the address—"Arise ye and depart."

As Lot to his sons-in-law,—"*Up, get you out of this place, &c.*" (Genesis xix. 14.) Or of the Lord to Lot,—"*Arise . . . escape for thy life, look not behind thee, &c.*" (Ver. 15, 17, 22.) Or as the shipowner to Jonah,—"*Awake thou sleeper, arise and call upon thy God.*" Or as Jonah to Nineveh,—"*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*"

—The command is urgent, pressing—admits of no delay : as the beacon-light—as the shrill trumpet—the signal on watch-tower : shake off sloth, indolence, &c., "*to arms !*"

2. A reason for this urgency—"This is not your rest."

—*Alas, to thousands it is*, and they have no other, no better; they seek the world and find it, "they have their reward"—they prosper in the world, and their bellies are filled with its hid treasure. What a poor, broken, disturbed, chequered rest it is!

—*But this is not the believer's home nor rest*: remind him of it—it is a fair, specious, treacherous world—many delights, fascinations, &c., even to him—snares, temptations. But it is not his all, nor shall he be deceived by it—there is a better world for him.

—*Not even his spiritual comforts here*, the rest into which he now enters—even this is not his all—"I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness"—never 'till then—desires more and more—"I beseech thee, show me thy glory"—there yet remaineth something better! Paul "caught up into third heaven," yet still declared "we see through a glass darkly—then face to face."

3. A still more urgent reason—

—"Arise ye and depart," for not only is not this world "your rest," but because it is "*polluted*." Not only is this present state fugitive, transitory, fading, treacherous, but it is polluted, sinful, corrupt—how can a believer make his rest, his home, his treasure, in "*pollution*?"

—Behold his present state! *He is himself polluted*. Were he in a holy world, how could he be happy? Sin is in him, in his heart, his head, his mind—indwelling sin disturbs, distracts him—he cannot rest while he is a sinner.

—*And the Church is polluted*—his brethren, companions, friends, are sinners like himself—hence errors, divisions, heart-burnings, schisms, separation—the best are, and continue till they die, sinners, how can he rest among them?

—*And the world without is polluted*,—altogether defiled and corrupt. Like just Lot "he is vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked." "Floods of ungodliness make him afraid,"—sin is rampant, daring,—how can he rest in such a world? No rest in *himself*, in the *Church*, or in the *world*,—"Oh! that I had wings like a dove, then would I flee away and be at rest." Like Noah's dove, "no rest for the sole of his foot." None, until delivered from bondage of corruption,—"*body of sin and death*," "from this present evil world," in joy and felicity.

4. A consideration yet more alarming.

This present world, and all that is therein, is doomed, devoted, about to perish,—"*it shall destroy you even with a sore destruction*."

—*The end of all things earthly*—FIRE! how bright, how gay, how lovely—all so delightful! But see this great world, it is only fuel prepared for the fire! (2 Peter iii. 10, 12.) “Elements melt with fervent heat,”—liquid fire! total final destruction!

—*How certain*,—no escape,—“By same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire!” The universal deluge, the smoking ruins of Sodom, the crumbling towers of Jerusalem, the fishers’ nets at Tyre, the disinterred monuments of Babylon confirm it! “Heaven and earth shall pass away, God’s word shall not pass away.” He who created will destroy.

—*And all who have lived in it, and loved it, shall perish with it!* Not it shall be destroyed, but “*it shall destroy you*,”—your idol shall devour you,—you shall share in the doom of your idol,—the earth shall swallow you up,—one common ruin.

—*What “a sore destruction” it will be*,—such as never witnessed since the earth was in chaos. Not a process of purification, no hint of it, but destruction—“burnt up.” Not as in flood—the surface covered, the earth remaining, “standing in the water and out of the water,”—“but heavens pass away with great noise”—“the first heaven and first earth passed away.” (Rev. xxi. 1.) Man, beast, and everything which live shall die,—and this suddenly, in a moment, without warning. “Who shall live when God doeth this?” Shall we not say, as in the text, “Arise ye and depart,” &c.?

1. *This subject suggests serious inquiry.* Where is your rest?—your treasure, your home, your chief good? Is it *here*—in this world,—is it below the skies?—plans, schemes, prospects, bounded by the dark horizon of the grave? How surely doomed to disappointment!

2. *Solemn warning!* Think of the catastrophe—the sure end,—see it approaching—[another year—last Sabbath—or any particular occasion of sudden death.]

3. *Profitable exhortation to all who are seeking God’s rest.* “Ye have arisen, and are departed!” Quicken your step—brighten your eye—nerve your arm—look not back—forget all behind—reach forward to that before—“stay not in all the plain”—beware of ease, luxury, worldly comforts—“keep yourselves unspotted from the world.” Let your heart and treasure be in heaven—look to Jesus—pray that you may not be “of the world, even as he was not of the world.”

XXX.

SPIRITUAL JOYS.

Psalm cv. 3. "*Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord.*"

HERE is a *generic term* for God's people—"they seek the Lord,"—definite, yet comprehensive; it may be applied to the awakened sinner—"he seeks the Lord,"—to the professing Christian—all his life he is "*seeking the Lord*,"—and the matured, departing believer can do no more; he dies, "*seeking the Lord*," nor will he fully find Him until he sees Him as He is in glory,—"*I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness!*"

—To such persons it is that the Psalmist addresses the exhortation of the text—"Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord."

Whence, in dependance on God's blessing, we may observe—

I. THAT IT IS GOD'S WILL THAT HIS PEOPLE SHOULD BE HAPPY.

II. NEVERTHELESS FEW OF THEM ARE SO.

III. THE CAUSES TO WHICH THEIR UNHAPPINESS MAY BE TRACED.

I. THAT IT IS GOD'S WILL THAT HIS PEOPLE SHOULD BE HAPPY. We might show that, notwithstanding all the disturbing causes, the goodness of God in desiring his creatures happiness appears in the animate world and among men in general, but the text limits it to his own people.

1. Consider what God has done to promote and secure the happiness of his people.

—He has redeemed them from sin, guilt, and corruption by the death, and passion, and glorification of his dear Son. That Son lives to intercede for them, and supplies them with all grace "out of his fulness in glory."

—To comfort, cheer, animate, as well as to sanctify them, his Holy Spirit dwells in them. "All things are theirs."

—They have abounding consolations, and Divine joys, and "peace which passeth all understanding." "No good thing will He withhold from them." "He gives grace and glory."

2. The exhortations to joy and praise abound in Holy Scripture.

—It is a duty, as well as a privilege, for believers to be happy.

—Old Testament writers and New alike repeat such stimulants to holy rejoicing. "Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous : for praise is comely for the upright." (Psalm xxxiii. 1, &c.) The Psalms are chiefly jubilant. "Rejoice evermore." "Rejoice in the Lord alway." "Your joy," said the Saviour, "no man taketh from you." (John xvi. 22.) "Blessed be God who always causeth us to triumph in Christ." (2 Cor. ii. 14.)

II. STILL IN ALL AGES GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE BEEN FOR THE MOST PART A SAD AND SORROWING PEOPLE.

—*It is often assumed that their portion in this world is usually a sorrowful one.* "They are strangers and pilgrims on earth." Large portions of sadness were administered to Jacob, to Joseph, to Moses, to David, Elijah, Jeremiah—to say nothing of Job himself. Much affliction is promised to the New Testament saints. "It is through much tribulation that we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts xiv. 22.)

—*And of modern Christians it is constantly alleged that they are gloomy and melancholy,*—and there is much in them to justify the world's accusation, as happy and rejoicing believers are rather the exception than the rule among persons of piety.

III. HOW IS THIS TO BE ACCOUNTED FOR? God has made a rich provision for his people's happiness, but they are not happy,—why is this?

—*May it not be accounted for by their manifold trials, temptations, afflictions?* Certainly not! because God sends corresponding help and grace; all persons of experience would attest, that the happiest and most rejoicing Christians are to be found among those who are most deeply afflicted! "When the sufferings of Christ abound in us, our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." (2 Cor. i. 5.)

—*Does not God sometimes withhold spiritual consolations from his faithful and consistent people?* He does so (see Isaiah l. 10),—"walketh in darkness," &c. But such cases are rare, and the time of shadows short, and speedily lead to stronger exercises of faith and surer joys.

The absence of religious joy and peace is chiefly to be accounted for—

1. In some instances by the hollowness of religious profession.

The heart is not true and right with God,—some secret passion,

appetite, lust, desire is allowed or indulged in. There can be no real happiness in religion while an idol is in the heart! "Cannot serve two masters." (Matt. vi. 24.) "Beloved, if our heart condemn us," &c. (1 John iii. 21.)

2. Where there is not direct heart treachery nor self-deception there may be an unsuccessful conflict with indwelling sin.

—"Oh! wretched man, &c." (Rom. vii.),—"groan, being burthened" (2 Cor. v. 4)—"Flesh lusting against Spirit," &c. (Gal. v. 17.) Natural character, impure, or sceptical, or vain, passionate, and revengeful—and the workings of these destroy peace of mind.

3. Defective views of God's all-sufficient grace:—

—labour as slaves, as hirelings, as legalists—forgetting that He who purchased forgiveness secured grace! "My grace sufficient for thee, &c." (2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.) "Thank God through Jesus Christ, &c." (Rom. vii. 25.) "Abide in me, &c., fruit." (John xv. 4.)

4. Errors as to the ground and source of a believer's rejoicing.

—Our joy, peace, comfort, &c., must spring not from our growth in grace, nor from anything in us, nor done for us, nor by us, but in and out of Christ alone—and all our sorrows are intended to drive us to this. (Isaiah xii. 1—3; lxi. 10, 11.) "Joyful in my God." (Psalm v. 11, 12.) "Joy in the God of my salvation." (Habakkuk iii. 18.)—So in the New Testament—"Rejoice in the Lord alway." God in Christ is the only abiding source of happiness to his people.

1. *Let all sincere Christians believe that a sorrowful experience is a defective and imperfect condition of soul.*

—Better be sad than indifferent, slumbering, &c. But a melancholy, gloomy, downcast, doubting state, is not the normal condition of a believer.

2. *Let all search and see whether any allowed sin, or inconsistency, or idol, remain in their hearts.* There can be no peace, no success, no joy, till this *Achan* is stoned and burnt!

3. *Let no one be satisfied until he is both happy and holy! Both within your reach!*

—*Are you afflicted?*—no matter from what source, rejoice. "Suffer affliction with people of God, &c."

—*Consolation withheld?*—wait, and watch, and pray—and look for the Spirit, and search for Christ till you find Him.

—*Corruptions?*—"nothing too hard for the Lord." Union with Christ by his Spirit alone subdues them.

—*Confused ideas?* perplexed views? doubts?—"All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." (Isaiah liv. 13.) Pray for light—"led into all truth, &c."

Happiness, present now, immediate, in store for you—"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour!"

XXXI.

THE SYROPHENICIAN WOMAN.

Matthew xv. 28. "*O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*"

JESUS showed mercy in different ways to different people: sometimes almost anticipating their requests, and on other occasions keeping them long waiting. "Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean! I will—be thou clean." Centurion's servant—"I will come and heal him." (Matt. viii. 7.) But he suffered the blind men to cry long and loud before He regarded them. (Matt. ix. 27.) And so in the story before us: may we learn to pray and to wait.*

Jesus sought retirement in the coasts of Tyre—a Gentile woman applies to Him—she cries for mercy, calls on Him as "LORD," and as "the SON OF DAVID," beseeches Him to heal her daughter; but He disregards her—"answered her not a word." The Disciples plead for her—but He rejects them also. Then she comes and worships Him, "saying, Lord, help me." He discourages her yet more, classing her "with the dogs!" She submits to the indignity, but claims the dogs' portion—"The crumbs which fall from their master's table." Upon this Jesus looked graciously upon her and said, "O woman, great is thy

* Here tell the story, with a few words in comment.

faith : be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

Regard—I. HER FAITH.

II. HER PERSEVERANCE.

III. HER SUCCESS.

I. HER FAITH. It was strong and clear.

(a) If she had not believed in the power of Jesus to heal she would not have come, nor would she have persevered. She worshipped Him as "*Lord*"—she recognised Him as Messiah, "*The Son of David*"—she relied on his power, love, faithfulness, and therefore, nothing could shake her purpose. It was all her faith that did this. "O woman, great is thy faith."

(b) *Learn the foundation of all earnest, persevering, successful prayer—it is faith!* Men will not come to Jesus until they believe their loss and ruin, and his ability to save them.

—This faith, and this only, supports the tried, tempted, harassed believer—he hopes against hope—despite his sad convictions, his manifold failures, corruptions, sins—"he looks to Jesus," "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." There he finds all he wants—pardon, peace, help, grace : and believing, he waits for his supply.

II. HER PERSEVERANCE ; this was very remarkable.

1. Never was any one more discouraged—

—Jesus left her long unnoticed ; and when she forced herself on his attention He spurned her, and classed her with the dogs. Still she would take no refusal—she cried more—the voice of helplessness,—
"Lord, help me !"

2. Admirable example !

Under circumstances far less disheartening how often do we "restrain prayer before God : " how soon are we discouraged ! how ready to say, "It is of no use !" As the Psalmist, lxxx. 3—5 ; xliv. 23, 24 ; Jeremiah xiv. 7, 8. Our remedy is *perseverance* : read more, pray more, wrestle with God as Jacob,—*"I will not let thee go except thou bless me."* Then *wait*—Psalm lxxxv. 7, 8 ; xxvii. 13, 14 ; xxxvii. 3, 5, 7, 34, 40 ; lxix. 3 ; cxxx. 5—8.

III. HER SUCCESS.

1. Not only was her request granted, but she was dismissed with honour and commendation.

The delay, the reproof, the apparent coldness and indifference, only heightened the blessing which came when least expected! Just had she been classed with the dogs—when she heard consolation and praise!

2. So shall it be with all who wait upon God in persevering faith!

The delay may be long, trying, heart-wearying, but the answer, full, gracious, abundant, shall come. "Call upon me in day of trouble, &c." (Psalm l. 15.) Unexpectedly, in some way unlooked for—but surely.

Exhort all to pray, and not to faint.*

XXXII.

"CALL UPON ME!"

Psalm l. 15. *"And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."*

SWEET SOUNDS, loving words, immediately followed by words of displeasure, grating on the ear! "But unto the wicked God saith." Our text then is addressed to the righteous! How important is discrimination! We must not address God's loving words to the wicked, nor his words of wrath to the righteous, lest we make the hearts of the latter sad, and confirm the wicked in his wickedness. Lord! teach us "to discern between the righteous and the wicked,"—and to give each their portion according to thy will! Consider—

I. THE CHARACTER AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PERSONS ADDRESSED.

* This sketch is purposely short, because the object of the writer is not so much to supply matter as to assist in its proper arrangement. There is here abundant matter suggested by the story itself.

II. THE ADDRESS ITSELF.

III. THE TWOFOLD PROMISE ANNEXED.

I. THE PERSONS ADDRESSED ARE GOD'S PEOPLE IN TROUBLE.

1. God's people.

The glorious Lord addresses them (v. 5), "Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." And v. 7: "Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel. . . . I am God, even thy God." To his penitent, believing, obedient people, this message is sent. Not to the world, the careless, ungodly, but to his own people.

2. But his people are in trouble,—he addresses his afflicted ones.
"The day of trouble"—a day that comes to all.

(a) *God's people have their full share of this world's common troubles*,—sickness, sorrow, pain, poverty, and death happen alike to all—no exemption for his saints! On the contrary, often a larger share falls to them than is common to men in general. "Whom the Lord loveth he correcteth," &c. (Proverbs iii. 12.) Many are the troubles of the righteous.

(b) *They are exposed to a whole class of troubles unknown to the world*. Spiritual troubles. Conflicts, temptations, the ebbing and flowing of soul joys and sorrows. Ah! careless world! little do you know what sighs are heaved and what tears are shed for you in secret by God's people! "The heart knoweth his own bitterness," &c. (Proverbs xiv. 10.) From within and from without, by inbred sin, and outward trials, God's people are often in "the day of trouble." They are "in heaviness for a season." (1 Peter i. 6.)

II. CONSIDER THE ADDRESS PRESENTED TO THEM—to the troubled righteous. "Call upon me!" Short, compendious, loving voice!

1. But who is this that speaks?

(Ver. 1.) "The mighty God, even the Lord hath spoken,"—glorious in creation, "from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof," but whose "perfection of beauty hath shined out of Zion." (v. 2.) This God of nature and grace,—it is even He who says, "Call upon me!" "The great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

2. He says, "Call upon ME"—on me only!—

Not on saints nor on angels, nor men in the body or out of the body—there is no help in them! Look away from all other helpers,

and look on ME! "I am God, and beside me there is no other."
"Cursed is the man that trusteth in man," &c. (Jeremiah xvii. 5.)
Simply, singly, trustfully, "call on me!"

3. He says, "CALL upon me!"

How? when? where? in what mode, form, posture? with what ceremonies? He does not prescribe,—all He says is "*Call!*" As the child for the breast—as the lamb bleating for his mother—as the hungry for bread—as the condemned for mercy! "All who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus!" &c. (1 Cor. i. 2.)
—*In your heart sorrows and bosom trials*—call upon me—breathe out the soul in my ear.
—*In your family and social troubles*—spread them before me.
In public calamities, national sins—call upon me.

III. HERE IS A TWOFOLD PROMISE,—“I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.”

1. Deliverance. “I will deliver thee.”

—How wide this promise—comprehensive assurance. Multifarious may be the troubles of his people—temporal, spiritual—from within, from without—thousands of troubled hearts, millions of sorrows—still to each one of his people he says, “I will deliver thee!” I, THE GREAT GOD, will hear, help, sustain, comfort, restore, and save THEE—a poor, helpless, disconcerted, desponding sinner! “I am able;” no matter how difficult the task—“nothing too hard for the Lord.” “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly, &c.” (2 Peter ii. 9.)
—*He does not say how, in what way, or when.* It may be when all hope is gone—unexpectedly, immediately, or you may have to wait long,—but deliverance will come. The evening of the day of trouble will arrive, and the morning of a brighter day shall succeed it.

2. “And thou shalt glorify me.” Not a bare deliverance—an escape, but you shall praise God for the trial.

(a) *God is glorified in us*,—by our cheerful resignation and suffering patience. “Tribulation worketh patience,” &c. God’s purposes accomplished in our trials. (Philip. i. 12, 13, 19.) “The cup which my Father,” &c. Our graces shine in our troubles, and God is honoured in us.

(b) *God is glorified by us*,—i. e., we shall bless and praise God for those afflictions which caused us so much pain,—we shall see his wisdom, love, and faithfulness. As Job, when he knew “the end of the Lord.” As Joseph, when his father came to Egypt. As David—“It is good for me that I have been afflicted.” As the family at

Bethany, when Lazarus rose. "Afterwards yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness."

1. *How blessed are they who habitually call upon God!* Who live a life of prayer, "near unto him"—enjoy communion with God—in ease, in comfort, in peace. So the day of trouble finds them prepared. "Seek him more and more."

2. *Woe unto them who call not upon the Lord.* To be prayerless is to be godless, and in the day of trouble to be friendless and hopeless! Oh, make Him your friend, and then "when flesh and heart fail," &c., he will be your God and "portion for ever!"

XXXIII.

THE FINAL DISCRIMINATION.

Malachi iii. 18. "*Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not.*"

WHEN shall this be? "In the day that I make up my jewels, saith the Lord of Hosts!" Wonderful! God's poor, feeble people are his jewels—his special treasure,—and a day is coming when he will count them over to see that none are lost, and "he will spare them as a man spares his own son!" He will do this publicly and collectively—a separation will take place—a day of discrimination so perfect that all men, good and bad, shall acquiesce in the result. "Then shall ye return and discern," &c.

May our minds be solemnized while we consider—

I. THE GREAT OCCASION REFERRED TO—THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

II. A SPECIAL OBJECT OF ITS APPOINTMENT.

I. THE GREAT OCCASION. "The day" (ver. 17), and (iv. 1)—"For behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven." Confess ignorance

and incapacity to describe it,—what length of time is meant by a “DAY,”—in what period of time it will occur,—and its circumstances and details? but “I believe that He will come to judge the quick and the dead,”—that it will be the grand event—the conclusion of the story of man’s being on earth. Some points certain.

1. The Judge.

He who ‘died, and rose, and is ascended into heaven. “The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son.” (Matt. xxv. 31; Acts xvii. 31; Romans ii. 16, &c., and xiv. 10; 2 Tim. iv. 1). “Behold, he cometh with clouds,” &c. (Rev. i. 7.)

2. The Judged.

No doubt, all who have lived, and all who have died, and all who are alive when he comes. Equivocation here is unbelief, scepticism, infidelity! Yet some divines deny the day of judgment as a specific act, or scene, or event! With these references before their eyes,—Matt. xxv. 32; Rev. xx. 11, &c.; Romans xiv. 10; 2 Thess. i. 7—9, &c., &c.*

3. The rule of his judgment.

—His word shall be the test, judged out of the book and according to their works. “Give an account of the deeds done in the body, whether good or bad, &c.” (2 Cor. v. 10.) The thoughts of all hearts, the words of all lips, the hidden things of darkness, and all secrets, then revealed, published, fully known: together with the secret prayers, alms, tears, penitence of his people.

* A caution may here be given against burthening a subject with too many quotations from Scripture. This is sometimes only an idle way of filling up time, and not unfrequently wearies the hearers rather than edifies them. The production of many texts, common and familiar to all, can produce no good effect. ONE apposite illustration or authority from the word of God, clearly bearing on your point, or unquestionably substantiating your argument, is better than half-a-dozen far-fetched or doubtful references. Sound judgment is needful in this matter; some subjects are so palpably true and evident that they require only here and there a pointed reference to Divine authority,—while others, which are either unpalatable or difficult, or of less certain import, need much clear support from Scripture. Beware of “marginal references;” they may mislead you; they are, in fact, the comment of the compiler—a sort of Scripture “ready-reckoner;” one parallel passage worked out for yourself is worth many so provided for you. It should be added that many more references are given in these sketches of sermons than need be actually quoted, chapter and verse, in preaching them; but they always convey some thought, or fact, or expression, bearing on the subject, which the preacher may do well to remember.

4. The Judge will divide them with ease and precision.

—"As the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats,"—He knows, discerns, appreciates, weighs the thoughts and actions. He cannot mistake nor be deceived.

5. The sentence!

"Depart, ye cursed"—"Come, ye blessed." Only two parties then! The saved and the lost, the righteous and the wicked—no middle state! Oh, what separations! eternal!

—See those entering into bliss!—poor, despised, persecuted in this life! See, there are poor Negroes, Hottentots, Indians, New Zealanders—"from the east and west and north and south"—many who despaired of selves, &c.

—See those going into "everlasting punishment"—the proud, the self-righteous, the unholy, the worldly-minded, the selfish—many a fair religious professor, many a priest and many a pastor, and many a leader of sects and parties—"Have we not prophesied in thy name, &c. . . . I never knew you, depart!" (Matt. vii. 22, 23.)

II. THE SPECIAL OBJECT OF THESE PROCEEDINGS.

1. Many ask, of what avail is the day of judgment?

The righteous dead are in paradise, in bliss—the ungodly are in a place of misery—our fate is determined when we die—why call happy spirits to judgment? or the lost only to be recommitted under aggravated sorrows? We might reply, what of the bodies? of the general resurrection? but the true answer is here—

2. To justify the ways of God, and the character of his people before assembled worlds!

—"Then shall ye," ye yourselves, my cavilling enemies, "return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, &c." "Their words had been stout against God, &c." (ver. 13—15), and they must be silenced—never until the judgment-day.

Now there is much perplexity and confusion—God's ways are dark, and often questioned—his people mistaken and slandered—"evil is called good, and good evil"—men of the world deluded and deceived.

Then God will be vindicated and justified in his people. All hearts being laid open, motives discovered, principles of action laid bare—it will be seen that God's people were not hypocrites—their secret prayers, tears, and good deeds will be brought to light, and all will admit them.

The hidden works of darkness, the vile motives, the selfishness,

pride, vanity, folly, and malice of others will be proclaimed—their hidden lusts and passions indulged, &c. (Eccles. xii. 14 ; 1 Cor. iv. 5.)

These things cannot be “*discerned*” now, but then they will be clear and evident, and all—men, devils, angels—will be constrained to acquiesce in the judgment as just. “THE DAY shall declare it !” (1 Cor. iii. 13 ; Psalm lviii. 11.) “Then the wicked will be silent in darkness.” (1 Sam. ii. 9.) “Then every mouth shall be stopped.” (Romans iii. 19.)

Who among us is prepared for this ordeal ? This day will come, nothing can stop it—fixed from all eternity, we must all be there—“every one of us must give account of himself to God.” (Romans xiv. 12.)

How should we search and try our hearts !

How urgent the call to fly to Christ in time, secure salvation, and a robe to appear in at that day.

Believers need not wait till that day for the vindication of God and his dealings with them ! They know “that all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, &c.” (Psalm xxv. 10.) “His ways are equal, ours unequal.” They trust Him, believe in Him, love Him ; and He loves them, and calls them his jewels—“dear in his sight”—“His delight is in them.” The judgment-day will be to them their triumph and their justification ! “Lift up your heads, for the hour of your deliverance draweth nigh !”

XXXIV.

CONCLUSION OF ALL UNDER SIN.

Galatians iii. 22. “*But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.*”

HOW shall man be just with God ? how at peace with Him ? Man has fallen, he has offended God, and is disobedient. To solve this problem is the professed object of all religions, and of every sect and form of the Christian religion. The mode of salvation is set forth in the text—the

wound must be thoroughly probed that it may be certainly healed: there is but one way—if there had been another (ver. 21) it would have been made known to us—"but the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Here is—

I. THE CONCLUSION OF ALL MEN UNDER SIN.

II. THEIR DELIVERANCE BY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.

I. "CONCLUSION" is here used in its literal sense, "a shutting up together"—"the Scripture"—to which Christ and his apostles constantly appeal as the final authority—the Scripture has concluded, or shut up together, as in a prison, all men under sin: sin is a gaoler who has put his fetters on every hand—as debtors, as criminals, reserved to judgment. How has the Scripture done this?

1. By its historical testimony.

The fall of man—Cain and Abel—murder and fratricide—the flood—Tower of Babel. The Patriarchs not without sin, and the nations around them, Sodom and Gomorrah. The best men "under sin." Job was impatient, Moses petulant, David,—how he fell! Jonah, Jeremiah, Elijah, cursed their birthday, and wished themselves dead!

The whole Bible one history of the wickedness of man, and of the corruptions of believers.

2. So also its dogmatic teaching.

"Only evil, and that continually." (Genesis vi. 5, and viii. 21.) David—"I was shapen in iniquity." "The whole head sick, and the whole heart faint." (Isaiah i. 5, 6.) "Heart deceitful . . . and desperately wicked." (Jeremiah xvii. 9.) Our blessed Lord—"Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, &c." (Matt. xv. 19.) The apostles everywhere. As Romans iii. 9, 19, 23, &c.: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

3. By its express law—the Ten Commandments rightly expounded and understood, shut us all up!

"By the law is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. iii. 20, and Rom. vii. 7, &c.) Therefore the Church bids us cry for mercy under each, "Lord, have mercy upon us," because we have broken this law.

4. The universality of this captivity :

"The Scripture hath concluded ALL"—"all"—"both Jews and Gentiles, for there is no difference"—all men, everywhere, and in all time alike, no exception nor escape. (Ephes. ii. 3.) "We all." Our common origin, and the oneness of our race, may be proved from this—the uniformity of sin in man ! Black and white, and copper-coloured, and civilized and savage, man everywhere the same. The Scripture truly concludes us all,—“all shut up under sin.”

II. THE DELIVERANCE BY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.

Here is the special object for which the Scripture labours "to conclude all under sin": all its histories, testimonies, laws, go to this end; that men might see themselves to be so shut up, so condemned, so hopelessly imprisoned, that they might welcome the only and sufficient deliverance. What is this deliverance ?

1. It is a promise :

—this salvation was a promised salvation from the beginning. Promised to Adam at the fall. "The seed of the woman, &c." (Genesis iii. 15.) Traceable through all the succeeding Patriarchs—especially to Abraham.

—*Typified by sacrifices in all ages.*

—Foretold by a chain of golden prophecies : from those "uttered by Enoch the seventh from Adam," echoed by Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jacob, David, and Isaiah, and all the holy men who have spoken in God's name.

—Fulfilled in Christ.

2. The substance of this promise.

"The promise by faith of Jesus Christ," i.e., the promise of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ—that men should be saved by this method—faith—faith in Jesus Christ. That when shut up under sin, guilt, wrath, and eternal judgment—faith in Christ's great salvation, his atonement, propitiation, sacrifice, should obtain perfect deliverance, emancipation, justification, sanctification—all and everything they need or desire. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness"—not only its accomplishment, but its object—to condemn and justify—to shut up and deliver—to curse and to bless—every man must be condemned, shut up, cursed, that he may be justified, delivered, blessed !

3. Our inclination and ability to accept this salvation is the gift of God:—

—“that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ *might be given to them that believe.*” The promise is free—and the gift is free—free grace—“it is the gift of God, lest any man should boast.” (Ephes. ii. 8, 9.) Grace shuts us up in prison—grace opens the door and sets us free—grace convicts us of sin, and grace leads us to Christ—points to the promise, lays it on our hearts, and by faith we are saved. (John i. 11—13.)

1. *Are you willing to acknowledge this humbling doctrine in your case?* or justify yourself? refuse to be “shut up?” Then never delivered! You must be condemned in your own eyes, or you will never be saved!

2. *Are you self-condemned?* Then look unto Jesus! (Zech. xii. 10.)

3. *Is the promise yours?* Then live on it, by faith! Act consistently.

XXXV.

ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.

Job xxii. 21. “*Acquaint now thyself with God, and be at peace!*”

ALL men by nature are alike ignorant of God—they mistake his character, confound his attributes, judge of Him by themselves! Some think of Him as nothing but love and mercy—such an one as will wink at sin—too kind to fulfil his threatenings: others imagine Him all terror, wrath, and judgment. Ignorance of God may consist with much religious feeling, sensation, enthusiasm, romantic ideas, and morbid sensibility—but a just and scriptural view of the true God, and a personal acquaintance with Him, lie at the root of all true religion. Therefore we say,—“Acquaint now thyself with God, and be at peace!” O Lord, be pleased to reveal thyself to us, in our hearts! Let us consider—

I. HOW A MAN MAY BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH GOD.

II. THE DEGREE OF INTIMACY TO WHICH HE MAY ASPIRE.

III. THE BLESSEDNESS WHICH WILL RESULT FROM IT.

I. What a wonderful science ! to know God ! to become acquainted with Him ! The mortal with the immortal, the creature with the Creator, the sinner with the Holy One ! How, where can we learn of Him ? You may see faint traces of his footsteps in Creation, and discover Him in his Providence ; but—

1. It is in his holy Word alone where his character is developed.

This is a revelation, a discovery of the true God—the God of the Bible—made known in all his infinitely excellent qualities. Justice and mercy, truth and love : and this only in perfection “in the face of Jesus Christ.” “No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son . . . he hath declared him.” (John i. 18.) “He was the brightness of the Father’s glory,”—“they that saw him saw the Father.” (John xiv. 9, 10.) To testify of God in Christ, and to discover the holy Trinity in unity—their oneness—and their union with the believer—this is the object of the revealed Word. See our Lord’s last discourses—(John xiv., &c.)—“The Scriptures are they which testify of me !” &c. (John v. 39 ; Col. ii. 9.)

—*If then, we would know God, how should we study his Word ?*—daily, continually, anxiously ! Is not this exactly what is neglected ? Men do not “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest Holy Scripture !” They think they know it, but they do not, and therefore know not the true God revealed, and yet concealed there ! A superficial acquaintance with the Bible is common enough—but a sound and deep knowledge of it is very rare, even in pious persons.

2. The diligent study of this book must be accompanied with earnest prayer, or we shall never know Him of whom it testifies.

There must be hours of retirement—serious thought—patient inquiry—earnest waiting upon God ! There must be “a shutting of the door, and a praying to our Father in secret.” (Matt. vi. 6.) “Lord, open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.” (Psalm cxix. 18.) The soul must seek, desire, long for God—“With my soul have I desired Thee,” &c. (Isaiah xxvi. 8, 9.) “My soul is athirst for God,” &c. (Psalm xlii. 1, 2.) “Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know,” &c. (Hosea vi. 3.) “With my whole heart have I sought thee,” &c. (Psalm cxix. 10.) If men live in a bustle, and lie down and rise up in a hurry, and are always “making haste”—when, where, and how are they to know

God? Can they know anything without study, thought, research? How then, know the great God!

II. THE DEGREE OF INTIMACY TO WHICH WE MAY ASPIRE: where is the limit to faithful search? Generally, as in other things, the measure of our earnestness, diligence, zeal in the search, will be the measure of our success. "They that seek me diligently shall find me." Holy men of old walked and talked with Him—as Enoch and Noah and Abraham, "his friends." And Moses too: see Exodus xxxiii. 11, 18; xxxiv. 6, 7; Numbers xii. 6—8; and Isaiah xliii. 1, 2; xlv. 1, 2. In the New Testament nearer still, as "Paul in third heaven," &c. (2 Cor. xii. 2.) But to what may we attain?

—*To glorious, soul-reviving views of God in Christ Jesus:* we may be wrapt in admiration, delight, holy joy and love, in beholding Him by faith. "We may taste and see that the Lord is gracious." "He will show us his covenant." "He will manifest himself to us as he does not unto the world." Till we exclaim with St. Paul, "Oh the depth of the riches," &c. (Romans xi. 33.)

—*To a confident persuasion of his love to us.* "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us," &c. (1 John iv. 16.) "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," &c. (Jeremiah xxxi. 3.) "I know in whom I have believed," &c. (2 Tim. i. 12; Galatians iv. 6, 7.)

—*Hence we enjoy continual communion with Him.* Not only at stated seasons—the hours of prayer—it may be morning and evening and at noonday—but all day long—"continue instant in prayer"—"pray without ceasing"—"pray to God always"—that is, a habit of prayer, a propensity of soul towards God—the thoughts and the heart and the desires ascend upward where God is! In trouble we seek Him for comfort, guidance, help! In sorrow for consolation! In joy and peace, that we may enjoy it in Him and with Him, and he with us. The sharer of our brightest hours!

III. THE BLESSED RESULT, OBVIOUS AND INEVITABLE—PEACE! "Be at peace!" Oh heavenly message! Soul's solace, heart's ease, the pillow of rest, the necessary result of such company, such habits—"Acquaintance with God" must give "PEACE!" What peace? who can describe it? "It passeth all understanding!" "Quietness and assurance for ever!" (Isaiah xxxii. 17, 18.)

—*Peace in the view of our sins.* We see the hand blotting them out! burying them, obliterating them! All forgiven, forgotten. "Being justified by faith we have 'PEACE' with God," &c. (Rom. v. 1.) "Thine iniquities are forgiven, thy sins covered"—"Go in peace!"

—*Peace in the midst of trouble.* In the world we cannot have peace and trouble at the same time. The world's peace means exemption from trouble—but the peace of God is enjoyed along with trouble, and in the midst of it. "Peace I leave with you—not as the world giveth—in the world, tribulation—but in me—'Peace!'" (John xiv. 27; xvi. 33.)

—*Peace in all spiritual trials, conflicts, temptations.* (Philip. iv. 5—7.) "Great peace have they that love thy law," &c. (Psalm cxix. 165.)

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1. *Art thou a stranger to God?* Oh seek Him—see what you lose!
 2. *Art thou sunk in sin and lost?* He seeks thee, and will save thee—only seek Him "NOW"—"Acquaint now thyself with God," &c.—don't put it off, &c.
 3. *Art thou a little acquainted with Him?* Oh follow on and seek more and more—rest not till you know Him fully and love Him wholly.
 4. *Troubled souls,* rest in Him! All is well, and shall be—"Commit thy way unto the Lord, and trust him." "Fear not, I am with thee," &c.
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XXXVI.

THE PROMISES SANCTIFY.

2 Corinthians vii. 1. "*Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*"

THERE are few instances where the sense of the inspired writer is so much disturbed as here, by the division of the chapters. The text is not only an inference drawn from what has immediately gone before, but it is the termination of a subject, from which the apostle turns to other

matters in the next verse. "Having, therefore, these promises"—what promises? those he had just named! "Union with God"—"the adoption of sons," &c. "Having therefore, these, let us cleanse ourselves!" The dependance of one part of the text on the other will appear if we consider—

I. OUR TWOFOLD NATURAL DEFILEMENTS: those of the flesh and those of the spirit.

II. THE EXHORTATION TO CLEANSE OURSELVES FROM THEM.

III. HOW THIS CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED.

I. OUR TWOFOLD DEFILEMENTS.

1. "The filthiness of the flesh."

By the term "flesh," St. Paul generally denotes our whole fallen nature—but here He distinguishes it from the intellectual powers. By the filthiness of the flesh we must understand the grosser appetites of our carnal nature—those we have in common with the animals, so that when men are their slaves they are called "natural brute beasts," &c. (Jude 8—10.) "Lusts of the flesh," drunkenness, lewdness, gluttony, voluptuous delights of all sorts.

2. "The filthiness of the spirit."

The spirit, mind, intelligence, imagination, and thoughts of man, are as "filthy" by nature as his body. Not only intellectual sins, as pride, vanity, scepticism, unbelief, but the more sensual passions may be indulged intellectually. Nay, our Lord says they all proceed out of the heart, the seat of feeling, sense, the will—refined sensualists are viler in mind and imagination than in bodily acts! Alas, the whole man is defiled, polluted, corrupt—"the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint," through sin. These distinctions between mind and body, flesh and spirit, are quite vain and futile, for the entire man is fallen and corrupt. (Titus i. 15.)

II. TO CLEANSE OURSELVES FROM THESE IS THE APOSTLE'S EXHORTATION.

1. How impossible this task!

"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" (Jeremiah xiii. 23.) "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" (Job xiv. 4.) How many have tried and failed: even

the apostle himself—"Oh wretched man that I am," &c. (Rom. vii.) To subdue the actual workings of appetite and their outbreak is possible, but who can cleanse the "filthiness" of his soul? The mental defilements, rebellions, &c., "With man it is impossible!"

2. But it must be done!

All Scripture testifies it. Unless the body be "kept under" we must be "cast away!" "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." (Heb. xii. 14.) No unclean person, nor impure, can enter the kingdom of God! One unmortified lust will be "the millstone round the neck," &c. (Matt. xviii.) Sin must be subdued, the flesh crucified with its affections and lusts, or there is no salvation for us.

III. HOW THIS GREAT WORK IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED: there is provision made; that which is impossible to unassisted man is possible with God!

1. There are the promises:

"Having therefore these promises, let us cleanse ourselves." These are the weapons of our warfare, the implements of our toil, the machinery in the factory of holiness! The media in our laboratory—the stimulants to our duty—the assurance of our success: without them all our efforts are vain—with them nothing is impossible!

2. There are the promises generally:

—Promises of sufficient grace and help. (Gal. iii. 14.) "My grace is sufficient," &c. (2 Cor. xii. 9.) "There hath no temptation taken you," &c. (1 Cor. x. 13.) "Sin shall not have dominion over you," &c. (Rom. vi. 14.) "God shall give his holy Spirit," &c. "Without me ye can do nothing," "I can do all things through Christ," &c. Promises suited to every variation of human feeling, trial, difficulty, temptation.

3. But it is to special promises we are here directed:

"Having therefore **THESE** promises," &c. What promises? Those he had just mentioned. (Chap. vi. 16—18.) Here is adoption, communion, fellowship with God as a Father: freedom of access with Him—union with Him—an indwelling God—one with Him and He with us. Here is the great sanctifying principle, and here its legitimate effects, in their proper order! Being pardoned, accepted, loved of God, and become his dear children, "let us cleanse our-

selves," &c. Not that we may be his children, but because we are so! Because He forgives us, loves us, pities us, is our dear and blessed Father—"THEREFORE," let us cleanse ourselves! Oh the sanctifying influence of a Father's love!

4. Yet more—there is a Divine power, energy, and influence of holiness hidden in the promises.

"According to his divine power . . . called us to glory and virtue. Exceeding great and precious promises—that by these ye *might be partakers of the divine nature*," &c. (2 Peter i. 2—4.) Promised help is power, is grace, is victory.

5. Hence all these promises are stimulants to successful exertion.

They may be abused, and what is not abused? Bad, idle, unholy men, may talk of them, and sin—but what of that? There is no sin in the *promises*—only in their *perverters*! To those who really "inherit the promises," Antinomianism is impossible! Who are those who "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling"—but those who believe "that God will work in them to will and to do," &c. Who will "add to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge," &c., but those "who by the promises are partakers of the Divine nature?" (Compare with passage above 2 Peter i. 2—10.) The provision is sufficient, perfect, Divine—"Having therefore these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the Spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

1. *Some may set men to work and labour and toil as galley slaves, that they may enjoy the promises*, which is to invert the truth and mistake the fruit for the root.

2. *Others may talk loudly about the promises, and walk and teach carelessly or unholily*: but their fall and ruin is obvious.

3. *Let us take the whole truth in its right order, and in its fulness*, and we need fear neither Antinomianism, sloth, nor legality; but shall walk in love as dear children, *and because we are so!*

XXXVII.

AN ANCIENT REVIVAL.

Nehemiah viii. 1—3. *“And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate ; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand ; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.”*

THIS was an interesting period of Jewish story—the return from the Babylonish captivity, which occupied nearly a century—the people coming up in detachments. Busied in the restoration of their temple and city, all classes appear to have been also actuated by an earnest desire for a revival of true religion. On this occasion the desire sprung from the hearts of the people themselves, who assembled in a body and requested pious Ezra to come and instruct them! It was a remarkable scene, and every circumstance connected with it is significant and instructive. Let us, in dependance on God’s blessing, endeavour to trace them.

I. OBSERVE THE NATURE OF THE CONGREGATION.

II. THE PLACE OF THEIR ASSEMBLY.

III. THE MATTER AND MODE OF TEACHING THEM.

IV. THEIR PROFOUND ATTENTION.

1. Of whom did this congregation consist? “Of the people,” &c.

—“All the people—as one man :” not the priests merely, or the Levites—no, nor merely the men, but the “women” also, and the children—“all that could hear with understanding.”

This was then unusual—in the temple worship all were separated—the court of the men, the court of the women, the court of the

Gentiles. Here, then, was a peculiar feature of this revival, men, women, and children—all ranks, ages, and both sexes—all as one, to hear and worship.

A type of Gospel times : all those Jewish distinctions are done away in Christ—woman is restored to her place beside man—there is no difference—"In Christ there is neither male nor female." (Gal. iii. 28.) All equally need Christ, and to all alike is He presented.

II. THE PLACE OF THEIR ASSEMBLY.

—Of course in the temple, or its precincts—*then* it was imperative to worship there, and nowhere else ! On the contrary—these people were assembled in the open air, in the street—(verses 1 and 3)—and on several other similar occasions they did the same, and no censure followed. (Chap. ix., &c.) It was a great and special occasion, and God blessed it.

—If then, under that rigid and exclusive dispensation it was held lawful and expedient to gather the people in an unconsecrated place, to teach them to pray and praise, and hear God's Word, how much more now ! Christ has plainly taught us that there is no place exclusively holy now. (See John iv. 21—24, and the sermon on it, p. 42.) (Acts v. 42.)

—For special objects, on great occasions, for a sufficient reason, we may, we must, we dare not refuse to preach the Gospel *anywhere* ! In the lecture-room, the town-hall, the barn, the assembly-room, or even in a theatre, if the lost classes will come nowhere else !

III. THE MATTER AND MODE OF THE TEACHING : "The book of the law of Moses." (Ver. 1.) "They read therein." (Ver. 2, 3.) "Opened the book," "and blessed the Lord and the people,"—"and they read therein distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." (Ver. 8.)

1. The substance and matter of their teaching was God's Word.

By the "law of Moses" the Old Testament Scriptures often intended—it was the Sacred Writings. These they read "DISTINCTLY," as they should always be read.

—And nothing less or more is the subject of our teaching ; the Word of God, the holy Scriptures. (Psalm xix. 10, 11 ; cxix.—the only theme of which psalm is "the law," the "testimonies," the "commandments.") To them Christ and his apostles ever appealed, "What saith the Scripture ?" "How readest thou ?" "Search the Scriptures," &c. "Inspiration of God." (2 Tim. iii. 15—17.)

2. Out of these they preached and taught and instructed the people.

This is the first "pulpit" we read of (ver. 4), and the best definition of a sermon; "causing the people to understand the meaning:" this should be the single object of the pastor, to spread God's Word before the people, and explain it, and "cause them to understand it."

—This was the origin of synagogue worship—and from this time forward Israel never fell into idolatry: the Word of God, never in previous ages so made known to them, was their safeguard.

IV. THE PROFOUND REVERENCE AND ATTENTION WITH WHICH THE PEOPLE RECEIVED THE WORD. We have seen how the thirst for the Word originated with the people (ver. 1). See—

—*Their attention*—"The ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." (Ver. 3.)

—*Their reverence*—"When Ezra opened the book, all the people stood up"—"And when he blessed the Lord the great God, all the people said, Amen, amen, and they lifted their hands, and bowed their heads, and worshipped with their faces to the ground!" Profound worship. (Ver. 5, 6.)

—*Their zeal*—They stood there for six hours, (ver. 3) and day after day (ver. 13), and again (ix. 1—3) did not complain of length of sermon! no weariness!

—*Their softening of heart*—"All the people wept when they heard the words of the law," and Ezra comforted them.

Oh! that this scene were enacted among us! Where is our "*attention*," fixed, earnest, undivided! Our *reverence* in God's house for his Word! the bowing head, the bended knee, the lifted hand! Our *zeal*, thirst, desire for God's Word—untiring love and patience in listening to it! And where is the *softened heart*, the moistened eye! What subjects are here for appeals to the conscience! What for our own humiliation!

XXXVIII.

PRAYER FOR DIVINE TEACHING.

Psalm cxix. 18. *"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!"*

A REMARKABLE sight! Here is royal David, himself wielding the pen of the Spirit,—an inspired writer, is pouring out his soul in prayer—for what? That he may be enlightened—that his eyes might be opened to understand the Word of God! A singular proof that those "holy men who spake" and wrote "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" needed Divine teaching themselves, in order to understand even their own writings. (1 Peter i. 10—12.)

—Now if they needed the Holy Spirit's teaching, how much more do we? Let us then examine this prayer of David: inquiring—

I. WHAT THINGS DAVID DESIRED TO SEE AND KNOW.

II. HOW HE EXPECTED TO LEARN THEM.

I. 1. The wondrous things which he desired to see were all contained in God's law.

This word "LAW," and its synonymes throughout this Psalm, may be taken for the *Revelation of God* contained in Holy Scripture. Whether "law," "statutes," "ordinances," "commandments:" whatever the term, the thing signified was the written Word, then extant. That was the casket which contained all the jewels—"the wondrous things." How have they since been increased! What precious jewels added! The entire Word of God now handed down to us—how precious! (Rom. xv. 4; 2 Tim. iii. 16; John v. 39, 46, 47.)

2. And what are the wondrous things in God's Word?

What?—why all are wonderful! The story of man's creation and fall,—the chain of evidence, proving his wickedness, through successive generations,—the tale of redemption and grace,—the precious promises, the loving precepts, the holy influences,—the things of the Spirit of God,—the revelation of a world to come, with all its eternal glories and everlasting woe,—wonderful things without number!

3. These wondrous things are hidden things ; else he would not pray that his eyes might be opened to see them.

—There must be in such a book some things obscure in themselves—dark, mysterious, and “hard to be understood.” (2 Peter iii. 16.)

—But chiefly hidden from the careless, and from the proud, the “wise and prudent.” (Luke x. 21.) The plainest things are dark and difficult to many, “though he who runs might read,” and “babes” could understand.

—*The Bible a sealed book to thousands.*

4. The cause of this.

Shall we say that the fault is in the book, or in the readers of it ? “Open thou mine eyes,”—ah ! the fault is in our eyes ; it is all there in the book—all we want to know, but we are blind and cannot see it.

—*Blind by nature*—born blind—shut against the truth.

—*Further closed* by prejudice, pride, self-love, the love of the world, of money, of sin. Thence those injunctions—“Lay aside all filthiness,” &c. . . . “Guile and hypocrisies.” (1 Peter ii. 1.)

II. HOW DAVID EXPECTED TO SEE THESE WONDERS OUT OF GOD’S LAW.

1. The rationalist tries to grapple with the difficulties of Scripture in the strength of human intellect,—

Arms himself with human science, skill in language, knowledge of history, &c.,—all good in their way, but feeble to discover “wondrous things.”

—*The schoolmen approach it through Church authorities*,—set the Church above the Scripture, and because Scripture is too hard for us send us to the 500 folios of the Fathers !

—*What did David ?* See him—the picture ! The roll of the sacred writings lies before him,—what does he ? He kneels down and prays that “the Lord would open his eyes !” would show him, discover, reveal to him their wonders !

2. The Author of this book must be its teacher.

God is the author,—“and all thy children shall be taught of God.” (Isaiah liv. 13.) “I will instruct thee and teach thee.” (Psalm xxxii. 8.) “Then opened He their understandings, to understand the Scriptures,” &c. (Luke xxiv. 45.) As all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, so all its readers must be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, to comprehend it.

3. This is obtained by constant earnest prayer.

This implies humility of mind, teachableness, desire to profit, and consciousness of our own blindness,—leading to daily, constant, patient, believing prayer, that God would remove the veil from our heart, and open our eyes to the precious things in his Word.

4. When the Scriptures are thus read with prayer “wondrous things” discover themselves.

Common and familiar passages break with new power, beauty, and force upon the soul,—a habit of personal application is given,—the promises are ours,—no longer a Saviour, but my Saviour! The fog has cleared up, the mist is dissipated,—“Blessed are your eyes for they see!” &c.

5. Herein is progress, growth, maturity.

“Desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby.” (1 Peter ii. 2.) “Nourished in word and doctrine.” (1 Tim. iv. 6.) By looking into this mirror day by day,—“changed to the same image,” &c. (2 Cor. iii. 18.) Precious book, “precious promises” in studying it. “Sweeter than honey in the honeycomb,” &c. (Psalm xix. 10, 11.) “Keep thee,” &c. (Proverbs vi. 21, 23.)

—Brethren, learn to read the Bible, not merely as a scholar, or as a divine, or as a schoolman,—nor merely to admire its beauties,—but read it as a believer, on your knees, lay its truths on your heart,—pray that you may receive, understand, love, and obey them. “So shall you make your way prosperous, and have good success,” &c. (Joshua i. 7, 8.)

XXXIX.

THE LESSON OF OBEDIENCE.

Hebrews v. 8. “*Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.*”

HERE is the great lesson of life—“OBEDIENCE.” Here is implied the great generic sin of man—“DISOBEDIENCE.” We shall never under-

stand the former until we comprehend the latter,—much less the teaching and training by which the latter is subdued. May God give us a wise and understanding heart !

I. THE GENERIC SIN OF MAN—“ DISOBEDIENCE.” Man’s universal fault—an essential element of all sin,—the foulest crime is no more,—the slightest wilful sin is no less. The comparative flagrancy of crime is not the question,—some persons are more guilty, others less ; we do not confound the shades of criminality, but we fasten upon a universal sin, from which none are exempt.

—*See this in the story of the fall of man.* Philosophers are offended at the trivial nature of the offence,—had man committed some flagrant act, they would have been content ! Yet his crime would have been no greater ! “ Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst *not* eat ? ” Yes, he had,—and that was *Disobedience* ! The smaller the restriction, the greater the offence. He rebelled, and died, and all his race became rebels—disobedient.

—*See this in the nursery.* Are not most children little rebels ? Does not the infant fight with its mother’s breast ? Before he can walk or talk, does he not rebel ? Do not children specially desire that which is forbidden ? One word covers all—*Disobedience* !

—*See this in youth and advancing age,*—the desire to throw off parental authority—*independence*—*daring*—*defiance*—“ Who is Lord over us ? ”—“ our lips are our own,”—we will live as we please !

—*See it as an intellectual sin.* Whence is that metaphysical pride which brings all revelation to its bar, which rejects this, and questions that ? Whence the sophistry which turns half God’s Word into a myth ? It is “ *Disobedience* ”—proud man rebelling against God’s truth. The nature of this evil may be tracked in every transgression—moral, spiritual, intellectual, as the case may be,—we are disobedient children.

II. WHAT THEN HAS GOD DONE TO QUELL THIS REBELLION ? What is the lesson whereby he obtains obedience—submission ? It is the lesson of life ! All that happens to us from our cradle to our grave is one great lesson of obedience.

1. This is the object of all education,—

—Unless this is obtained education is not begun ! Hence the distinction between teaching and training ; the former may impart

all knowledge to the young—language, science, history, philosophy, but without training, moral government, restraint, formation of character,—only mischief is effected.

—*Obedience must be obtained*—whether by reason, or affection, or moral suasion, or by the rod,—obedience must be obtained, or the child is ruined—prompt, cheerful, ready, uncomplaining obedience! That point gained, you may mould the child as you please.

2. But in too many instances this is not effected,

—and the boy shoots up to youth, and the youth to manhood, uneducated,—that is, “*Disobedient*.” He goes forth proud, impatient of control, self-willed, daring, and he enters into the school of life!—his education is beginning! He is subjected to the discipline of God! Trouble, affliction, difficulty, sorrow come upon him,—he battles bravely!—“The spirit of a man sustains his infirmity,”—he rises superior,—but the heavy hand of God is upon him again—he droops, sickens, his nerve is shaken, his spirit quails, his disobedient heart is humbled, he is crushed! He has learned the lesson of life!

3. God teaches his own people obedience after the same fashion.

The evil in them is subdued, but not destroyed,—It rises up from time to time. Whence those hard thoughts of God?—those questionings of his love?—those suspicions of his faithfulness?—doubts, fears, disquietude, wanderings? They are all **DISOBEDIENCE**!—Hence our chastisements, afflictions, sorrows, trials, and “many tribulations”—all in love. (Heb. xii. 5—12.) For this Job was chastened,—when he was humbled, he was restored. (Job xlii. 4, 7.) “I will visit their transgression with a rod,” &c. (Psalm lxxxix. 32, 33.) “You only have I known, therefore will I punish you,” &c. (Amos iii. 2.) We bring discipline on ourselves by our own unfaithfulness.

4. But here is the great lesson of all.

A suffering Christ learning obedience! “Though he were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered!” Whose Son was this? God’s own, and only begotten Son—“the very brightness of his Father’s glory and the express image of his person”—sinless as God his Father, and holy as he was holy,—yet he must learn obedience, and that through suffering! How could this be? There was no disobedience or tendency to it in Him. Why then this painful lesson? Because it was a lesson of his manhood, and its verity, because it was new to him,—He had ever been obeyed, and now must obey! That He might exhibit man’s perfect obedience, for an example, and for sympathy,—and as He learned his lesson (see

Isaiah l. 4—6), so He taught it, as it was never taught before ! If God's holy Son must learn it—how much more we ! His life—infancy—youth—manhood—sufferings—death—“obedient unto death,” &c. (Philippians ii. 8.)

III. AND NOW THE BLESSED LESSON IS LEARNED ! The rebellion is subdued—the proud heart humbled—the will broken—the heart softened—the mind and image of Christ stamped on the soul,—see the ripened believer waiting his release—“his mind is in perfect peace.” (Isaiah xxvi. 3.) “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.” (Luke ii. 29.)

There may be much pain, long struggling, feeble, faint, dying, but all is well—“it is well”—the soul is swallowed up in God's love, wisdom, goodness, grace—he kisses the smiting hand, drinks the Father's cup. “It is my Father,” “It is the Lord,”—the lesson is learned, there is no disobedience there, and the happy soul is borne to that place where disobedience cannot be !

—*Brethren, have you learned this lesson ? Are you learning it ?* If not, your education is not begun ! Oh ! humble yourself—become as a little child. (Matt. xviii. 2—4.) Yield yourself to the loving discipline of God that you may be trained for glory !

—*Let us promote early education,* and labour to bring all the disobedient children of Adam into the loving school of Christ, that they may become “obedient children.” (1 Peter i. 14.)

XL.

EDUCATION.

Ephesians vi. 4. “*And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath : but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*”

THE apostle had taught the duty of children to their parents (ver. 1—3), showing that God's blessing specially rests on obedient children. But

here he inculcates the solemn responsibility of parents to their children. The Scriptures never recognise the modern system of public or parochial schools, which then had no existence, but fixes all responsibility on nature's schoolmaster and schoolmistress—the father and mother! Let us, then, seek grace while we consider—

I. A DANGER AGAINST WHICH THE APOSTLE WARNS US.

II. THE POSITIVE INSTRUCTION HE AFFORDS US.

I. HE WARNS PARENTS AGAINST A SPECIAL DANGER: "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath."

1. This caution implies that there are bad tempers in the hearts of children which may be exasperated by injudicious treatment: latent anger, passion, sullenness, revenge, and all other evils of full-grown man are nascent in children.

2. He cautions parents, especially fathers, against provoking, irritating, exciting their passions, instead of allaying them in their children. This may be done—

—*By the faulty tempers of the parents*—angry, peevish, capricious.

—*By undue severity*:—indulgence is sinful, but there is an opposite extreme. "For their own pleasure." (Hebrews xii. 10.) That is, thoughtlessly or capriciously.

—*By pressing religious subjects injudiciously on gay hearts*: forgetting the natural antipathy to them—the need of wisdom, moderation, and love, to commend religion to a child.

—*By denying them innocent recreations*: when we take from them many worldly pleasures which some people think harmless, we are bound to find something else to amuse them.

—*By fickle and changeable rules*—wrong to-day and winked at to-morrow—a want of evenness and steadiness in our government: this tends especially to "discourage them." (Col. iii. 21.)

—*By entrusting little children to ignorant, bad-tempered nursemaids, &c.*, who sadly "provoke them to wrath."

3. These evils have been sown broadcast in many of our public schools for all classes.

—*By the system of flogging and beating*, for trifles, and indiscriminately—hardening the heart and brutalizing it.

—*By want of confidence in the children*—destroying self-respect and love of truth, creating a conspiracy against the teachers ; where no honour is reposed, none will be returned.

—*By making the hill of science artificially steep*, burdening the memory and cramping the understanding.

—*By a want of nice and discriminating justice* in their government—nothing “provokes” like this.

—*Such systems are entirely bad* : and while they may succeed in forcing a certain amount of knowledge into the mind, they destroy the moral character.

II. CONSIDER THE APOSTLE’S BEAUTIFUL SYSTEM—‘Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.’ Every word here weighty, and much more so in the original, which here should be carefully examined. Not a word about the *matter* of teaching—all has respect to the mode and the training.

1. “BRING THEM UP” (ἐκτρέφω).

This word means educate, “nourish them up” like Timothy—(1 Timothy iv. 6)—from infancy, babes, infants, children, youth—all to be nourished with suitable food, discipline, guidance, influence :—as of *body*, so of *mind*. It is a moulding of pliable materials, leading up to life and manhood.

2. “NURTURE” (παίδεια).

This is a comprehensive term ; rather means regulation, discipline, bringing all moral and religious influences to bear on the heart and soul and mind—the will and the affections—with special reference to wise, moderate, affectionate correction, &c. (Hebrews xii. 7.)

3. “ADMONITION” (νουθεσία) is the forming of the mind, fixing the opinions, settling the judgment.

It has to do with the understanding, reason, reflection. As parents should early mould the faith and principles of their children.

4. And all this “IN THE LORD :

—a most comprehensive phrase, applicable to all the preceding ones—“educate” them in the Lord—“train,” “discipline” them in the Lord—“fix their creed,” their faith in Him. This is spiritual teaching and training—in the Lord’s truth, in his ways, in his faith, fear, and love, in his Word, the spiritual and religious element pervading all.

Let all parents ponder these apostolic injunctions, and be humbled. Who has come up to these directions? Who does not see with mortification his own faults repeated in his children? Yet let them take courage; there are many promises to godly parents—let them labour, watch, pray, hope, and leave the result to God!

—*Let children who have pious parents,* and all who once had them, regard their injunctions, prayers, and instructions with deep reverence; and reflect on them with filial piety. Such education is a great responsibility, an opportunity lost, or redeemed for good.

—*Have any of you ungodly parents?* Do you see great faults, failings, perhaps sins, in them? Remember the sons of Noah. (Genesis ix. 23.) Draw a veil over their inconsistencies; pity and pray for them; honour what is good in them, and God will bless your reverence and affection.

—Do we not all need to repent, and do we not all need forgiveness and mercy for Christ's sake, at the hands of God, for our manifold sins of omission and commission, as parents and children, brothers and sisters, neighbours and friends?

XLI.

THE SABBATH LAW.

Exodus xx. 8. “*Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy.*”

THIS of all the Commandments, the most beneficent, best suited to man's weariness and necessity, specially calculated to set forth God's love, wisdom, goodness, and consideration, for the best interests of the human race, is just the one selected to be questioned and objected against. “It is Jewish, Mosaic, ceremonial—not adapted to the genius of Christianity,” &c. But let us candidly examine it, and honestly conclude about it! And may God the Spirit guide and direct us!

I. WE WILL TAKE A RAPID GLANCE AT THE HISTORY OF THIS COMMANDMENT.

II. CONSIDER THE SPIRIT OF ITS REQUIREMENTS.

I. Its history is peculiar; it stands alone among the ten.

—*It is coeval with Creation*—not in the form of a commandment, but as an accomplished fact (Genesis ii. 1—3), embedded in sacred story. As God spent six days in creation, so He spent one in rest—if the six days were twenty-four hours, so was the seventh. And as He rested on that day, so He blessed it and hallowed it. A day, a seventh part of the days, long or short, is consecrated, dedicated, made holy before the fall of man.

—*Nearly 2,500 years pass away before we read of it again.* 1,600 of those years were days of wickedness, probably of Sabbath-breaking. But if the command or record was neglected it does not follow that it was repealed: no proof that it was not observed.

—*Suddenly it appears* (Exodus xvi. 22, 23) as if well known—and a threefold miracle, which lasted weekly for forty years, consecrated it to Israel—*before the giving of the law.*

—*Then the Decalogue*—spoken by God's own voice, written by his hand, on stones carved by himself—a moral law, a universal law—amidst sanctions, wonders quite unparalleled—in the centre of this law, is the Sabbath commandment: who will dare to wipe it out? Who will say, "Nine are moral, universal, primitive—here is one not so!" When was it repealed, and where?

—*Now the Sabbath is interwoven with the Mosaic system*—with its ceremonial, its national polity, and its civil code. Many other laws are added to the Fourth Commandment, which were not in it, nor ever belonged to it. But so it was with all the other nine! There is not one which was not so dealt with in Jewish law—but were they repealed thereby? Were they made Jewish? The Sabbath, in its Jewish form and Mosaic additions, was observed for 1,500 years; until Christ came.

—*Did the Founder of Christianity repeal the Sabbath?* Never! He never did, nor said anything that even touched the Fourth Commandment, to diminish it. He brushed away Rabbinical additions—released it from Mosaic peculiarities—showed that works of mercy, charity, and necessity, did not break the law:—and then He spoke of it as an integral part of the two tables (Matt. xxii. 40): finally ratifying it as of universal obligation—"THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN!" Not for Jew, nor for Moses, nor for a nation!—"He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it." (Matt. v. 17.)

—*And then the day was changed*:—unimportant, because not a ceremony, but a moral law. Why? Christ rose on the first day of the week—consecrated it by repeated meetings with his disciples

three weeks successively : the day of Pentecost was on the first day—and from that time for 1,800 years the Christian Church has so observed it. The old Sabbath was kept by Christian-Jews in addition to the Lord's-day for a while, and then subsided.

—*Here is a great fact*—the Sabbath law, coeval with creation, certainly revived when religion became national, and observed by Jews and Gentiles for 3,500 years without a *break* ! Now revealed as a type of the eternal Sabbath. (Hebrews iv. 1, 9.) Can a law be more highly sanctioned, or more extensively observed ?

II. HOW, THEN, SHOULD IT BE OBEYED ? All its enactments may be comprised under two ideas—"REST" and "SANCTITY."

1. REST. This is the import of the word "SABBATH"—

—and its consecration sprang from the rest of God, the ceasing of his work—creation was done—and nothing has been created since. All these 6,000 years or more God rests from material creation, and is occupied in the Sabbath work of man's redemption.

—So our observance of it, to cease from all ordinary labour, worldly cares, occupations, thoughts, words, and works.

—A most merciful design—man would soon perish without it, and beast too ! The animal world cannot endure ceaseless labour.

—Therefore all men in place and power should secure rest for their dependants, servants, apprentices, artisans, &c.

—All public works, companies, houses of business, should cease their labours, that their servants may rest. (Deut. v. 14.) No unnecessary work should be done : but how much, or how little, or whether we may use horse or carriage for religious purposes—are *details* of which each man must judge for himself.

—A Christian Legislature should protect its humbler subjects, and by shutting up all shops, especially spirit and drinking shops, prevent *compulsory labour*.

2. BUT THE MORE IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC IS "SANCTITY."
"Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy," "because the Lord blessed it, and hallowed it." And so in Genesis ii. 3. This is the pith and marrow of the Commandment. We cannot make rules or say how you should make it holy,—what you should do, or what you should not do—just "SANCTIFY it !"

(a) *Do this yourself*—in your own heart and soul. Let a Jewish prophet teach you. (Isaiah lviii. 13.) "Call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable," &c. There will be positive observance—

you will frequent the house of God, means of grace, &c., but these are only means to an end. At home, in family, alone, in all you do, "make holy." "May I do this? and that?" &c.,—yes, if it tends to *sanctity*—not else! or to charity, or to mercy! Each must judge for himself,—any book, company, occupation, which secularizes the day must be wrong.

- (b) *Promote it in others.* By example, spirit, habit of life, conversation. By giving facilities to your household for public worship and private devotion. Take a high tone—enter into God's rest and God's holiness, and you will not greatly err.

Who can contemplate this searching law without repentance? "Lord, have mercy upon us," for we have broken it,—“and incline our hearts to keep this law.”

XLII.

THE PATHS OF THE LORD.

Psalm xxv. 10. "*All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and testimonies.*"

AT all times seasonable to retrace the dealings of God with us in the journey of life, and in the pilgrimage of the cross. Many are perplexed, and their faith sorely tried,—oh! to administer comfort to a tempted one—to raise a fallen one—to cheer one fainting! May God bless our meditation!

I. THE PATHS OF THE LORD ARE OFTEN DEEPLY MYSTERIOUS.

II. THAT NEVERTHELESS THEY ARE MERCY AND TRUTH, ESPECIALLY TO HIS PEOPLE.

I. "THE PATHS OF THE LORD." These are his ways or dealings—his providential decrees and ordinances,—his works, doings, &c. These are often deeply mysterious. (Psalm lxxvii. 19.) "His footsteps are not known." This may be illustrated—

1. In the world at large.

Mysteries in Creation,—much to perplex in natural philosophy,—much more in the moral government of the world. Why is this permitted? Why such wickedness allowed? Why good men cut off—bad ones spared? (Psalm lxxiii. 16.)

2. Equally so in the visible Church.

Here we might expect consistency, holiness, &c. In *sacred story*, why a Judas—a Peter? Why Ananias and Sapphira? Why did apostles differ and separate? Why so soon after the death of apostles was the Church corrupted? Whence the decay of the middle ages? Whence the divisions which have disgraced later days? Why is our own Church disfigured by party spirit, error, and false doctrine? Are not “the paths of the Lord” mysterious?

3. And not less so are his dealings with individual members of his own spiritual mystical body,—“the blessed company of all faithful people.”

(a) *Each individual believer is a wonder to himself*,—his own heart perplexes him—hoped to have escaped from the workings of evil—from inbred sin. But how sadly disappointed! Corruptions within, temptations without, “fightings and fears,”—sometimes doubt and despondency tempt him to think God has forsaken him,—he questions God’s dealings with him,—“My ways are hid from the Lord.” (Psalm lxxvii. 7—9.)

(b) *His intercourse with Christian brethren often further disturbs him*. There is so much selfishness, narrow-mindedness, uncharitableness; and there are so many inconsistencies! The best of men laden with infirmities, and they jostle our own, and therein discord and division even among true brethren.

Since all these things might be rectified, did God see fit, many Christians are sorely perplexed because God withholds his hands. His paths are mysterious,—but nevertheless—

II. ALL THE PATHS OF THE LORD ARE MERCY AND TRUTH, ESPECIALLY UNTO HIS PEOPLE. His paths, his ways are not only merciful and true, but they are actually “mercy and truth;” all his dealings with the world, the Church, and individuals, are marked by the impress of truth and love.

1. Towards the world at large.

(a) *In creation and providence*,—much to show wisdom, and love, and

goodness, at least in design,—though a future day only can explain such wonders.

- (b) *In the visible Church*—faith can discern God's will and loving purposes in much seeming evil. In many cases we can see "the end of the Lord." (James v. 11.) The falls of the apostles, the errors of the early Church—all occasioned the record of such truths as the Church would not have had but for these things. Not only persecutions, oppressions, trials, but even those things which have disfigured the Church have been overruled for the good, correction, and instruction of thousands. God's ways were mercy and truth in permitting them.
- (c) *Even ungodly men are often compelled to see this, and justify God in his righteous dealings with them.*

2. But it is to his faithful people that God's ways appear as mercy and truth.

- (a) *Their definition*,—"they are such as keep his covenant and his testimonies." (Psalm ciii. 17, 18 ; Isaiah lvi. 4, 5.) What covenant? The covenant of his grace and love in Christ Jesus. "His everlasting covenant." (Jeremiah xxxi. 31, with Hebrews viii. 10—12.)—This they keep, cherish, lay up in their hearts,—it is their life—their all,—"His faithfulness and truth their shield," &c.,—and his testimonies, commandments, promises in like manner.
- (b) *Now to them emphatically*,—"All the paths of the Lord," &c. "ALL his paths?" Yes,—all! The darkest and most dreary ; the saddest and heaviest afflictions, trials, temptations,—all—all are full of mercy and truth, love and faithfulness. (Psalm cxix. 75.)—*Not only will it be seen hereafter that it is so*,—in the great day of settlement,—when all known from the end to the beginning ;—*But now in the midst of crushing trials*, direful conflicts, tempests of passion, feeling, contention, "those who keep God's covenant," see his love, taste his mercy, and rely on his truth and faithfulness. This is that which supports them,—"they kiss the rod," "rejoice in tribulation," "glory in their infirmities," "take their Father's cup," "count it all joy." "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good."*

* The unity of this subject would be more closely maintained, and its usefulness to pious people increased, by throwing out altogether the difficulties arising from God's dealings with the world at large, and confining the discussion (as the text undoubtedly does) to those encountered by his people. "All the paths of the Lord towards such as keep his covenant and his testimonies;" that is the subject,

1. Appeal to careless, ungodly men. Justify God by your repentance ! Acknowledge his mercy and forbearance to you,—is it not enough ? Now, at length, hear his loving voice, and turn unto Him and live.

2. Appeal to the experience of the godly ! Cannot you testify ?—his witnesses ?—“goodness and mercy all your days,” &c. “All his paths” have been mercy and love to you, and you can even now praise Him, and glorify Him, even for your sharpest trials,—every seeming act of severity has already furnished fresh tokens of his love ! How will you praise Him when all is over ! How should you love and serve Him now !

XLIII.

JEHOVAH OUR SHEPHERD.

Ezekiel xxxiv. 15, 16. *“I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick : but I will destroy the fat and the strong, I will feed them with judgment.”*

“PROPHESY against the shepherds of Israel,”—“I am against the shepherds, saith the Lord God.” (Ver. 1—10.) And having discharged these evil or slothful men, Jehovah himself assumes the office. “Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out,” &c. (Ver. 11.) And having in a measure executed the office himself, he delegates it to Christ, the good Shepherd. (Ver. 23, &c.) How wonderful is God’s love for his people in Christ Jesus ! Contemplate—

I. GOD’S TENDER CARE FOR ALL HIS PEOPLE.

and a strict adherence to it would give more scope and time for illustration of the points which affect his people only. The first subdivision under each of the two heads would then be omitted ; and the second subdivision under each might be curtailed.

Preference should be given to either of the two plans according to the character of the people addressed. For a more religious and well-instructed congregation the latter scheme would be more profitable,—bringing out more questions of religious trial and difficulty,—while the more general mode of treating the subject might suit a mixed congregation better.

II. HIS SPECIAL REGARD FOR SOME OF THEM.

III. HIS DISCRIMINATING JUDGMENT ON OTHERS.

I. GOD'S TENDER CARE FOR ALL HIS PEOPLE. No doubt it is Jehovah who speaks. (Ver. 11 and ver. 30; Zechariah xiii. 7; John x. 11.) And He addresses his people. (Ver. 31.)

1. See Him gathering them to himself.

(Ver. 11—13; Luke xix. 10.) "He seeks the scattered, brings them out and gathers them." Calls them in various ways—by mercies—by love—by judgments—by chastisements—by the means of grace—by the Word, Gospel, Sacraments—out of all countries—from all classes—all ages—but it is always his doing,—“I, even I.” He saved Noah, and Lot, and Nineveh.

2. See Him feeding them.

(Ver. 13, 14, and in the text; John x. 9.) “I will feed my flock, I will cause them to lie down,” &c. In the green pastures of his Word, ordinances, sacraments; He feeds them in prayer—in all the means of grace, public and private.

3. He gives them rest and security.

“I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord.” (Psalm xxiii. 1, 2.) Weary with the world,—with cares, sorrows, temptations—He gives them rest. “Come unto me, all ye that are weary,” &c. Security,—lie down as in a bed—safe—He watches while wolves prowl—unknown dangers—men and devils—but “He keeps you every moment”—a sleepless eye and faithful heart. In the midst of trouble, He is with us. “And when He giveth quietness, who then can give trouble?” &c. (Job xxxiv. 29.)

II. HIS PECULIAR CARE OF SOME. Observe their special characteristics.

—*The lost*,—the wanderers, backsliders,—“Gone astray like a sheep that is lost.” (Psalm cxix., last verse.) Like “prodigal son,”—sons, children, sheep are they,—but they have wandered—“left their first love” (Rev. ii. 4)—gone back to “beggarly elements,” &c. —*These He will seek*—“even on dark mountains.” —*Those that are driven away*—by sin, by Satan, by persecution, by world, by many terrors, by “grievous wolves.” (Acts xx. 29, 30; Acts viii. 1; Jeremiah l. 6, 7, 17.) He will bring them again, as Abraham did the family of Lot.

—“*The broken*” in heart, for sin—bruised and wounded in sore conflict—crushed with sorrow—cast down, and all but destroyed! “I will bind it up,”—“He hath torn, and He will heal,” &c. (Hosea vi. 1.) “He came to bind up the broken-hearted,” &c. (Isaiah lxi. 1—3.)

—“*The sick*” in soul, mind, spirit, manifold diseases, fears, doubts, corruptions, &c. “I will strengthen them.” He giveth medicines to heal their sickness. “There is balm in Gilead—there is a physician there.” (Jeremiah viii. 22, and xxx. 17.) The tenderness of Christ. (Isaiah xl. 11.)

—For all these, and such like, the Good Shepherd has special love, tenderness, and care.

III. HIS DISCRIMINATING JUDGMENT UPON OTHERS. “I will destroy the fat and the strong, and will feed them with judgment,”—who are these?

1. “The fat and the strong” in this world’s goods, pleasures, joys,—entangled in its cares,—beguiled by its charms,—content to have it so. “Rich, and increased in goods,” &c. (Rev. iii. 17.)

2. “The fat and the strong” in self-righteousness,—proud profession of religion—despising others,—“Thou hast made my mountain so strong, it shall never be moved.” (Psalm xxx. 7.)

3. “The fat and strong” in hypocritical profession of religion,—indulging appetite secretly,—lusts, carnal passions, or covetousness, and fraud.

The Shepherd will feed all these, but it will be with judgment,—they have pasture, but it shall be wrath,—“wine,” but it shall be of the wrath of God! He will discriminate between cattle and cattle—sheep and goats. He does so now—only He lets them alone till by-and-by.

—*What encouragement for all who sincerely desire to seek and to serve God!* You may be as lost sheep, wandering sheep—helpless, gone astray,—but if you pray, “Seek thy servant” (Psalm cxix. 176)—the good Shepherd will find you!

—*What assurance of love and faithfulness to those who are his sheep,*—weak, unworthy, sinful though we be—He will not forsake us, but feed,

guide, comfort, cheer, and keep us in his fold, safe to the end. Hear his precious promises—"I am the good Shepherd," &c. (John x. 11, &c.) May we follow Him whithersoever He goeth !

XLIV.

OBEDIENCE AND SACRIFICE.

1 Samuel xv. 22. "*And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.*"

THERE are many popular abuses of Scripture phrases, *e.g.*, "Charity covereth the multitude of sins"—as if an alms would atone for sin! "Be not righteous over much"—as though we could be too religious! "A time to dance"—as if the Bible sanctioned the ball-room. "Provide for your own"—an excuse for selfishness and covetousness. "In my Father's house are many mansions"—as if that taught different *degrees* of glory. All these are misapprehensions, or perversions of Scripture.

The text, in like manner, has been misinterpreted, therefore let us—

I. RESCUE THE TEXT FROM SOME POPULAR PERVERSIONS.

II. SHOW ITS TRUE IMPORT.

I. "To obey is better than sacrifice:" "that is," say some, "what a man does, his actions, his life, his conduct, his practice, that is the chief thing—what he thinks, or believes, his prayers and spiritual life, are of little consequence." This is a gross and fatal error.

—*What is the Old Testament history, but a record of the spiritual life of its chief personages?*

—How Adam communed with God—and Enoch, and Noah, and the Patriarchs "walked with God"—how Jacob "wrestled with Him" (Genesis xxxii. 24) and "waited for his salvation." How Moses

worshipped Him in the bush, and in the holy mount, and desired "to see his glory!" (Exodus xxxiii. 18.) What are the psalms but the devotions of the ancient Church. The time would fail to tell of David, and of Hezekiah, and the prophets, and their ceaseless prayers; of Ezra and Nehemiah too.

—*What else is the New Testament but a similar record?* Were not all the Saints distinguished by a life of prayer? What of the Master himself? Did his days of practical service prevent his nights of prayer? Did He not teach prayer? Look at Simeon, and Anna, and Cornelius—"who prayed to God alway." (Acts x. 2.)

—The idea is fatal! Could a man live as holy as an angel (which is impossible), if he lived without constant prayer, he would be an infidel and an atheist!

2. Again, it has been argued from the text, that the meaning is that sacrifice was of little importance, that the mode of man's approach to God was a slight consideration, or comparatively so, even then!

—Surely the whole Bible contradicts this! and nowhere more so than in the thirteenth chapter of this book, when Saul is rejected for a presumptuous sacrifice.

—*The Old Testament is one great sacrificial testimony.* See Cain and Abel—Noah's sacrifice. The Mosaic system: see Nadab and Abihu. (Leviticus x. 2.) God's jealousy of it. "250 men who bore censers." "The calves in Bethel," &c. The royal leper. (2 Kings xv. 5.) The lions which God sent to devour those who worshipped Him not aright. (2 Kings xvii. 25, 26.)

—*The New Testament confirms and explains the testimony*—"That without shedding of blood there can be no remission of sins." (Heb. ix. 22.) But one way to God; and that despised,—there is no other. (John xiv. 6.) The most amiable, virtuous, honest, admirable person who lives, if he comes to God despising his sacrifice, and refusing salvation through the atoning blood of Jesus, must perish! "There is no more sacrifice for sins." "There is salvation in none other." (Acts iv. 12.) All other prayer is "stubbornness and disobedience."

II. THE TRUE IMPORT OF THE TEXT: THAT SACRIFICE IS NO APOLOGY FOR DISOBEDIENCE.

1. No outward religious observances, however correct, will make a bad man acceptable. Such was Saul: he feared Samuel, and God, and the devil; yet he was constantly rebellious, habitually passionate, revengeful,

evil, and offered sacrifices merely for political expediency: or hoping, it might be, to escape punishment by such forms.

—*Such conduct condemned throughout Scripture*: the sacrifices of hypocritical, inconsistent, unholy men, always rejected. (See Isaiah i. 11—16; Psalm l. 7—17, li. 16, 17; Ezekiel xxxiii. 31; Proverbs xv. 8.) “The prayer of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord.”

2. In order to make any sacrifice acceptable it must have two qualifications.

- (a) *It must be offered according to the will of God.* Under the old dispensation it was a bloody sacrifice—now, through Christ alone: in either case God’s revealed and appointed way! He who THEN came without a sacrifice was rejected; and NOW he who ventures to bring one will be condemned! He does despite to the “ONE, ONCE OFFERED.” This is the ordinance of God, and herein is the obedience of faith! Woe be to him who trifles with it!
- (b) *Not only so, it must be offered by one truly and habitually obeying his commandments.* May not then the sinner, the wicked, the lost come? Truly! but they must leave their sins behind them! the love and practice of them! The first act and fact in repentance is to turn away from sin! All who are accepted by the blood of sprinkling are by that very sprinkling sanctified, separated from sin and sinners.
- (c) *These two things must be ever united in the accepted worshipper.* Sacrifice without obedience is hypocrisy—obedience without sacrifice is infidelity. Prayer without piety and holiness is presumption—fancied virtue without devotion and sacrifice is pride, unbelief, Pharisaism, and self-righteousness.

Learn to take a comprehensive view of Holy Scripture; balance one portion by another; interpret Scripture by Scripture; look at the context, examine the narrative, the whole argument of the writer, and the facts connected with it: be convinced that the Word of God can never contradict itself.

Labour for a sound, sober, affectionate application of Scripture to your own heart and conscience by God’s Holy Spirit. Don’t aim so much at nice doctrinal distinctions, nor affect a complete system of divinity, but lay hold of great facts and great truths, and make them your own—

weave them into your daily life:—not a neat scheme “of faith and duty,” but powerful heart-supporting principles, to be lived on and lived by every hour. Above all, lay hold of the GREAT “SACRIFICE”—it shall be your “OBEDIENCE:” “This is the WORK of God, that ye BELIEVE on Him whom He hath sent.” (John vi. 29.)

XLV.

GIVING PLACE TO THE DEVIL.

Ephesians iv. 27. *“Neither give place to the devil.”*

ALTHOUGH the Power of evil is designated in many passages of Scripture by name, and though personal acts without number are attributed to him, yet there are professed believers in Holy Scripture who question his individuality, “regard evil as a principle, a power, an influence”—and reject the idea of a distinct wicked being, at the head of innumerable hosts of beings as wicked as himself:—all who so think are in great danger of the sin of the text—“They give place to the devil.”

May it please God to enlighten us on this solemn subject, while we consider—

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE ENEMY.

II. THE APOSTLE’S WARNING RESPECTING HIM.

I. AS SURELY AS THERE IS A GOD, SO SURELY IS THERE A DEVIL ! The condition of the world might suggest it. Traces of the footsteps of an intelligent evil being are surely discoverable. Men without revelation have universally come to the idea of two Gods, a good and a bad one. All the worship of the heathen proves it.

—But the Scripture is plain. A chief, or principal of the evil spirits distinctly designated by many names. He is “the Old Serpent”—“Satan”—“Beelzebub, the chief of the devils.” (Luke xi. 15.) “Lucifer”—“The prince of the power of the air”—“The god of this world.” The fallen angels are his people and servants.

(2 Peter ii. 4, and Jude 6.) "The devil and his angels." (Matt. xxv. 41.)

Personality—see our Lord's temptation and conversation with Satan—also with the Legion; and on many other occasions. The whole action of Satan in the Gospel story shows individuality, or it is calculated to mislead us!

—*Hopeless wickedness and enmity to God*: the worst acts of the vilest of men are said to be suggested by Satan. "He entered into Judas," and goaded him on to betray his Master: innumerable instances.

—*Sovereignty over the wicked ascribed to him*—"The prince of this world." (John xiv. 30.) He claims it. (Luke iv. 6.) "The spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." (Ephes. ii. 2.) "Ye are of your father the devil," &c. (John viii. 44.) The lies of Ananias and Sapphira attributed to him. (Acts v. 3.) "Thou child of the devil." (Acts xiii. 10.) Cain was said to have been "of that wicked one." (1 John iii. 12.)

—*So is he the enemy, tempter, accuser of the brethren*. "Your adversary"—"A roaring lion." (1 Peter v. 8.) "Principalities and powers." (See Ephes. vi. 10—17.) He desired to sift Peter. "We are not ignorant of his devices." (2 Cor. ii. 11.) He stirred up David to number the people. (1 Chron. xxi. 1.)

II. THE APOSTLE'S WARNING RESPECTING HIM: "Neither give place to the devil:" more literally, "give him place"—that is, a place to stand on, room to act in—opportunity, "advantage over you." (2 Cor. ii. 11.) By contrast, Satan came and "found nothing in Christ." (John xiv. 30.) That is, no opening, no entrance, no weak spot.

1. How may we give place to the devil?

—*By placing ourselves in circumstances favourable to his temptations*: seeking company, society, occupations, which have been ensnaring to us.

—*By dallying with temptation, as Eve did*—to look after, allow, desire, touch, &c., anything forbidden.

—*By pampering the body*: gluttony, wine-bibbing, feeding up the flesh: not actual intoxication, but too much: adding fuel to the fire: "fulness of bread."

—*By an unrestrained imagination*—allowing "vain thoughts to lodge in you"—(Jeremiah iv. 14)—unwholesome indulgence in works of fiction—so that the mind becomes feeble, morbid, unable to resist temptation.

—*By a life of indolence and sloth* : a vacant mind is an open door for Satan—"A house swept and garnished to receive him"—if we are not pre-occupied by positive good, evil is ready to enter—"Abundance of idleness." (Ezek. xvi. 49.)

2. If, then, we would not "give him place," we must maintain hostilities against him : all who are not actually opposing him are giving him place.

"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James iv. 7.) We must not act on the defensive, it is a disadvantage—there must not merely be passive resistance, but active pursuit of him. He is a conquered foe—"Christ has bruised his head." (Genesis iii. 15.) He has triumphed over him and his hosts—"Nailed them to his cross." (Col. ii. 14.) The promise is for us—(Rom. xvi. 20)—"Bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

What a deadly struggle is this ! How formidable our enemies—"Not flesh and blood, but spirits of wickedness in high places!" Who is equal to the conflict? Not one! But there is armour provided (Ephes. vi. 10—18), and God's strength promised to earnest prayer. Satan is strong, but Christ is stronger! Many are the evil angels, but there are more with us than against us. "Let us then fight the good fight of faith"—"Strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," let us not fear. Christ has conquered, and we shall conquer in Him! Yea, "be more than conquerors through Him that hath loved us," &c. (Romans viii. 37.)

XLVI.

EVANGELICAL OBEDIENCE.

Psalm cxix. 32. "*I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*"

GOOD men of all sects and parties in Christendom desire that God's Commandments should be kept—none but wicked men and hypocrites can dissent from this : the object of all the moral and spiritual machinery

known upon earth is to make unholy man holy: the fitness of that machinery for its object is the grand question. How is this object to be accomplished? The Psalmist answers this question to God himself, in this his meditation! "I will run in the way of thy Commandments, when thou shalt enlarge," enfranchise, emancipate, my heart; or, as the Prayer-book version renders it—"when thou hast set my heart at liberty." This will lead us to speak—

I. OF THE OBEDIENCE OF AN IMPRISONED HEART.

II. OF THE OBEDIENCE OF A HEART THAT IS SET AT LIBERTY.

I. Here we do not speak of the disobedient, or the rebellious, but of those who desire to keep God's Commandments, but succeed most imperfectly, because of an *imprisoned heart*!

—*Here is a heart oppressed with the burden of past sins*: when the attempt is made to love and serve God, or to glorify Him, old sins rise up, like ghosts, or evil spirits, disturbing and distracting the soul! It seems as if they never could be forgiven—"My sins have taken such hold upon me that I cannot look up!" "A sore burthen." "The remembrance of them is grievous—the burthen of them intolerable!"

—*Another is burdened and clogged by indwelling corruptions*—constitutional failings, as sloth, selfishness, sullenness, or passion—the grosser appetites, rising up, craving indulgence, disturbing and distracting a soul that would be holy. "Tied and bound with the chain of our sins." How can I keep God's Commandments?

—*A third is enslaved by a spirit of fear*—he can see God only "as a consuming fire"—a dreaded Judge—a hard Master. The spirit of fear may seize a man of God. "David was afraid of God that day:"—and this is "a spirit of bondage" (Galatians v. 1)—depressing the soul, and tending to make God an object of dread, and his service one of terror and distress. "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke v. 8.)

—*A fourth is in bondage to a spirit of formalism*: attaching undue importance to the observance of ritual services; religious ordinances; and those forms of worship which are intended as channels of grace to the soul, not as good works to be done. This spirit appeared early in the Church: "Ye observe days and months and times and years," said the apostle; "I am afraid of you." (Gal. iv. 10, 11; and Col. ii. 20—23.)

—*All these yokes are composed of one material, viz., the merit of works.* Often unconsciously, but still it is there—causing the humble, conscientious, but ill-instructed heart to labour, toil, fight, pray, beneath a weight and burden, which cumbers and distresses. There is a species of humility which is a fruit of self-righteousness and unbelief.

—*Now this is the obedience of an imprisoned heart*—a heart which has never known relief from the burden and guilt of sin, and the weight of inward corruption. It is the obedience of fear, not of love, and therefore must ever be *defective, slavish, and displeasing to God*: for “Works done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ: . . . we doubt not but they have the nature of sin.” (Article XIII.)

II. THE OBEDIENCE OF A HEART THAT IS SET AT LIBERTY: “I will run the way of thy Commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.”

1. What then, is a liberated heart?

(a) *A heart delivered from those burdens of which we have spoken. From the guilt of sin.* “Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven, and his sin covered.” (Psalm xxxii. 1; and Rom. iv. 7.) “Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven.” “The forgiveness of sins through the riches of his grace” is the liberation of the imprisoned soul. “Thou wast angry with me, but thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.” (Isaiah xii. 1.) *From the terrible pressure of indwelling corruption*: sinful nature will be there; “the flesh”—and it will lust against “the Spirit,” as long as we live. “But sin shall not have dominion over you,” it shall wax weaker and weaker. “My grace shall be sufficient for thee—perfected in weakness.” *From the spirit of fear*—“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear.” “But the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy i. 7.) “Casting out fear, because fear hath torment.” (1 John iv. 18.) *From the spirit of formalism*—no longer a slave to ritual observances while gladly fulfilling them, hoping to find in them God’s gifts of effectual grace. *Discarding all merit of works*—all hope of cleansing selves, or making ourselves fit and holy: looking only to Christ to justify, and to the Eternal Spirit to sanctify.

(b) *A heart admitted to the holy liberty of the Gospel and the enjoyment of God’s love.* This cannot be understood through any description of it, it must be felt and experienced. “If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” (John viii. 36.) “Being justified by

faith we have peace with God," &c. (Romans v. 1.) "We have known and believed the love which God hath to us—God is love." (1 John iv. 16.) It is freedom of access to God in prayer—it is continual enjoyment of his presence—it is life and light and peace: "It passeth all understanding:" it is to breathe the pure air of God's promises; to walk in love!

2. How can this be obtained?

It is God's gift—it is the work of his Spirit on the soul—free and rich and full: none other can impart it—nor can it be obtained elsewhere.

—*Yet is it to be had for asking*—"He giveth the Holy Spirit to them that ask him:" to those who thirst for it. "My soul is athirst for God, for the living God." "As the hart panteth for the water-brooks," "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," &c. (Isaiah lv. 1.)

3. And when obtained, then, and not till then, shall we run in the way of God's Commandments:

—till then we might creep, or limp, or crawl—but now we will run! Who can measure the obedience of a *liberated heart*? So cheerful, ready, willing, honest, free, unreserved! No longer slavish, mercenary, reluctant, measured—it is the obedience of affection, of love, of gratitude for mercy received. The burthens are removed, the heart is light, the step is free, the brow erect—no longer bowed down as a bulrush—"I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." Commandments, duties, services, however arduous, become sweet as the promises to a liberated heart—conscious of God's favour, reposing on his love, trusting wholly to his help—"He leaps and walks and praises God!" "The youths shall faint and be weary, &c., but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." (Isaiah xl. 30, 31.)

Would you be holy? Would you keep God's Commandments? Then seek a heart enlarged by his grace, and filled with his love! Seek it in prayer, in his Word and ordinances.

XLVII.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST'S BODY.

John ii. 19. "*Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*"

THERE is a double purpose in the use of parables by our blessed Lord—sometimes to veil the truth, and sometimes to make it more plain. This twofold object might be accomplished in different hearers of the same parable—"A cloud of darkness to these, and a light to them." A beautiful illustration here of the death and resurrection of Christ: and one that the Jews understood—for they afterwards made it a ground of accusation against Him. Let us then, depending on the teaching from above, contemplate—

I. THIS TEMPLE IN ITS BEAUTY.

II. SEE IT IN RUINS.

III. BEHOLD IT RESTORED AND GLORIFIED.

I. "Howbeit he spake of the temple of his body." The temple a type of the body of Christ. "There standeth here one greater than the temple." (Matt. xii. 6.) "Christ the true tabernacle," &c. (Heb. ix. 8—12.) "The body prepared," &c. (x. 5.) "The body of Christ." (Col. ii. 17.)

1. A living man is a more glorious temple than Solomon's!

Mind, soul, intellect, feeling; as a mere man no building so glorious as Christ.

2. The temple was holy—dedicated, consecrated:

—the holiest thing and the holiest place known on earth—but Christ more holy—"That holy thing which shall be born of thee," &c. (Luke i. 35.) He was holiness—the holy one—sinless, spotless, as God himself.

3. The temple was the dwelling place of Jehovah, and "in Christ dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Col. ii. 9.)

The body of Christ was the temple of Deity, in which the entire

Godhead dwelt, and was "manifested"—"God manifest in the flesh:" so as He never was in his earthly temple. The Deity shown in the face of Jesus Christ.

4. In the temple alone, or towards that temple alone, would God be worshipped:

—there his name, his altar of sacrifice, mercy-seat, &c. So in Christ, and through Christ, and by Christ, will God alone be worshipped—He is the altar and sacrifice, and High Priest and mercy-seat—all, all accomplished in Him. "He is the way," and the only one—all may come to God by Him, and by none other.

5. In every point of view how lovely, glorious, holy, this living temple!

Follow Him in his work, see Him in his personal beauty—when men hung upon his lips, and drank in such words as never man spake. Oh! this temple in its beauty!

II. SEE IT DEFACED AND IN RUINS!

—Behold that fair and holy form bathed in a bloody sweat in the garden—defiled by the traitor's kiss—smitten, insulted, "His visage marred more than any man's," &c. Crowned with thorns, torn with the scourge—bleeding, fainting, sinking beneath the cross—pierced with nails—suspended on the tree—dying, dead, buried!

—The beautiful "temple is destroyed."

[This description might be enlarged.]

III. BEHOLD IT AGAIN REVIVED, RESTORED, GLORIFIED! "Destroy this temple, and after three days," &c.

—*The story of his resurrection familiar.*

—*This was effected by himself*—"I will raise it up." "I have power to lay it down, and power to take it again." (John v. 21; and x. 17, 18.) But often attributed to the Father. (Acts ii. 24, 32.)

—*The fact that his resurrection is indifferently attributed to the Father and to himself, is the strongest possible proof of his Godhead.*

—This great event attested and corroborated by a thousand witnesses: no Gospel fact more certain—enumerated by St. Paul. (1 Cor. xv. 3—8.)

—No event more important.

1. This was the final ratification of the work of Christ upon earth:—

—his mission, his personal character, his identity as Messiah—all and more, turned on this event. If he had not risen the whole

revelation of the Gospel would have been proved fabulous. (See St. Paul's argument at length, 1 Cor. xv. 12, &c.) "*But now is Christ risen,*" &c.

2. In Him our resurrection, or the restoration of the temple of our bodies, is secured.

—*We are now his temples*—"Your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost," &c. (1 Cor. vi. 19.) Not only living temples, with living souls inhabiting them—but holy to the Lord. "Habitation of God through the Spirit," &c. (Ephes. ii. 22.)

—*But these temples are to be destroyed*—this lovely form, palpitating heart, warm hand, is to be cold in death and "eaten of worms"—"Dust to dust."

—*But these temples are to be rebuilt*—and Christ's glorious risen body is the pledge of ours—"Because I live ye shall live also." (John xiv. 19.) Your bodies shall rise again: "glorious bodies, like unto his glorious body," &c. (Phil. iii. 21.)

—*The death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the pledge, earnest, first fruits of the resurrection and glorification of all his people.*

Let all seek a personal interest in these great events. Those only who now believe in Christ, love Him, rise with Him from the death of sin to a life of righteousness, can hope to rise and reign with Him hereafter. We must die with Him if we would live with Him; we must suffer with Him if we would be glorified together.

XLVIII.

A LIVING CHRIST ABLE TO SAVE.

Hebrews vii. 25. "*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*"

THIS is the conclusion of an extended argument; the apostle had been contrasting the weakness of the Aaronic priesthood with the grandeur of that of Christ's; especially in this particular,—its perpetuity: Jewish priests died, and were succeeded by others; "but this man, because he

continueth for ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood." "Wherefore he is able also to save, &c." Here we have—

I. A LIVING AND INTERCEDING CHRIST.

II. HIS CONSEQUENT ABILITY TO SAVE.

III. THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO WILL BENEFIT BY HIS SALVATION.

I. 1. Here is a living Christ: "He ever liveth."

Often bid you look at a suffering, dying, dead Christ—now to a living one! He is "the living one," "and is alive for evermore." (Rev. i. 18.) "He has ascended up on high." (Psalm lxxviii. 18.) "Lift up your heads, ye gates, &c." (Psalm xxiv. 7.) He is seated at the right hand of God, where Stephen saw Him. (Acts vii. 55, 56.) His present glory cannot be exceeded, though it may be displayed at his second coming. "He has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High." (Chap. i. 3.) "He is King of kings and Lord of lords." "All power is given him in heaven and earth." (Matt. xxviii. 18.) "Sit thou at my right hand, &c." (Psalm cx. 1.)

2. Here is an interceding Christ: "To make intercession for us."

Atonement, reconciliation, propitiation, are all finished and complete—but here is a work continued in heaven! A great mystery. Positively taught in Scripture. "Who also maketh intercession for us." (Romans viii. 34.) "We have an advocate with the Father," &c. (1 John ii. 1.) "Now to appear in the presence of God for us." (Chap. ix. 24.) Equal with God, He cannot now pray to Him, and plead for us as He did on earth—but as our representative, federal head, He presents himself, presents our prayers, and, by virtue of his person and office as God and man, secures our certain acceptance.

II. HENCE HIS ABILITY TO SAVE: because He lives, because He is at God's right hand, everlasting, almighty, therefore He is "mighty to save." (Isaiah lxiii. 1.)

—*He saves from sin, guilt, punishment, hell!*—"He saves to the uttermost."

—*Out of the profoundest depths of sin and guilt*—none so fallen that He cannot recover them.

—*Out of the vilest corruptions and inveterate habits—nothing too hard for him, nothing impossible.*

—*In the most desperate extremity and greatest difficulties.*

—*“To the uttermost,” to the end, perfectly, everlastingly—“Now unto him that is able to keep you,” &c. (Jude 24, 25.)*

Here is our comfort, assurance, joy : a glorious Christ, an everlasting Christ, a Christ able to save.

III. TO WHOM THIS SALVATION AND THIS ADVOCACY ARE EXTENDED : there is a comprehensiveness and an exclusiveness—“All who come unto God by Him.”

1. What, then, is it “to come unto God by Him ?

—*it is to be convinced of our own sin and helplessness.*

—*to mourn over sin with godly sorrow.*

—*to seek a Saviour in the diligent use of all means and ordinances, in prayer, in the Word and sacraments.*

—*It is to believe in the heart and confess Christ with the mouth—to lay hold on Him, rely on Him, hope in Him, trust in Him, renouncing all hope from ourselves, or anything we can do : loving Him confidingly, and obeying Him heartily.*

2. All who so come unto God by Him shall enjoy all the blessings of his advocacy : they shall be saved.

—*See the comprehensiveness of this—“All who come” in this way—all—good or bad, moral or immoral, more or less virtuous—it matters not if they come unto God by Him, repenting, believing, hoping in Christ, and Christ alone, they shall be welcome.*

3. But no others shall be accepted.

—*See the exclusiveness of the declaration—it is limited to such comers. Not only are they excluded who do not come at all, but those also who will not so come ! Many seek God in their own way, in the pride of their intellect, in the merit of works ; they come as Cain with an unbloody sacrifice—and they shall be rejected like him ! “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me !” (John xiv. 6.) If they “go about to establish their own righteousness” they are excluded. (Romans x. 3.) Rejecting God’s mode of approach, there is no other !*

Many sincere Christians shut themselves out from the higher life, and consolations of the Gospel, because they do not come thus ! Looking to

themselves, their growth in grace, their attainments, progress, works, instead of Christ alone, and Christ altogether! They come to God, not doubting Christ's salvation, but cumbered with themselves, their own experiences, conflicts, and the ebbings and flowings of grace in them; instead of trusting to the finished work of Christ on earth, and his continual advocacy in heaven! Oh! if men would come empty-handed, they should have all and abound!

XLIX.

WHITSUNTIDE.

Galatians v. 25. "*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*"

HALLOWED SEASON! when we are called to contemplate the person, Godhead, work, and offices of the Holy Spirit, preparatory to the mystery of the Holy Trinity in Unity!

—But all of no avail, unless we consider these great truths practically, personally—as they act upon our hearts and lives. As here in the text, where we have the life and walk of the Spirit in the believer! Oh, for an enlightened and spiritual mind, that we may be able to understand these deep things of the Spirit, remembering (1 Cor. ii. 14) "that the natural man receiveth them not!"

I. HERE IS AN HYPOTHESIS ASSUMED—"If we live in the Spirit."

II. AN INFERENCE DRAWN—"Let us therefore walk in the Spirit."

1. To live in the Spirit implies a previous death.

Without the Spirit all are "dead in sins;" "you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." (Eph. ii. 1.)

2. The origin of this life. Whence it is.

It is in Christ, who is alone the life, the source, origin, spring of all spiritual life. (John i. 4.) "In Him was life," &c. "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John xiv. 6.) This life drawn out of Christ and imparted to dead souls by the Holy Spirit, quickens

them, and they live in and by the Spirit. "They have passed from death unto life." (John viii. 12 ; and v. 24, 26.) The process of this life and light-giving (2 Cor. iv. 6)—"They are alive from the dead." (Rom. vi. 13.) Still more perfectly (Rom. viii. 2)—"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," &c. A law or principle of spiritual life in the soul.

3. To live in the Spirit implies spiritual sustentation.

A new state of existence, which must be maintained by its appropriate nutriment. All life—animal, vegetable, mental, spiritual—needs its peculiar nourishment. The analogy of life natural, perfect in life spiritual. "As milk for babes, and meat for strong men" (1 Cor. iii. 2 ; Heb. v. 12, 13) ; so spiritual food for spiritual life. How live in the Spirit ? How sustain, nurture that life ?

- (a) *By profound, diligent, spiritual study of God's Word.* "The sincere milk of the Word." (1 Peter ii. 2.)
- (b) *By frequent communion,*—the spiritual life refreshed, revived, animated—fellowship of the saints—"one bread, one body." (1 Cor. x. 16, 17.)
- (c) *By meditation, solitude, contemplation, quiet moments !* Must be much alone with God, if we would "grow in grace,"—quicken the Divine life by Divine converse.
- (d) *By all means which promote communion with God*—supplies of life out of Him—life in soul fluctuates—it is strong and weak, healthy and unhealthy—needs medicine and food.
- (e) *By separating ourselves from all persons and places and occupations that tend to grieve or quench the Spirit.*

II. If we thus live in the Spirit, then "LET US ALSO WALK IN THE SPIRIT.

"To WALK" in Scripture always implies the practical life. "To live," is spiritual existence,—"*to walk*," is to perform the functions of life,—the one regards the spring and source of existence, and the principle of life,—the other has respect to the practical evidences of life.

—*Do everything spiritually*—whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to God's glory. Let the spiritual life diffuse itself through all your actions—specially your religious ones. Do you pray ? "Pray in the Spirit." (Ephes. vi. 18.) It is promised "to help our infirmities." (Rom. viii. 26.) Do you search the Scriptures ? Pray, "Lord, open thou mine eyes," &c. (Psalm cxix. 18.) Go about all your humbler, domestic, practical duties, in constant

dependance on the help of the Holy Spirit. Aim at the highest spiritual life and walk.

—*Such a spiritual walk will be rich in good works*,—these are the legitimate fruits of the Spirit. (Galatians v. 22, 23.) You will abound in them more and more. “Fruits of righteousness.” (Philip. i. 11.) “Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,”—taught by the “grace of God.” (Titus ii. 12.)

—*All this and more is freely promised*; and therefore none can say it is impossible. “Your Heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.” (Luke xi. 13; Ezekiel xxxvi. 25—27.) “I will put my Spirit within you.”

Now let us search and see! what know we of this spiritual life—of this spiritual walk? All here are either spiritually alive or dead! What a solemn,—what a fearful alternative?

—Do you honestly desire to know how this is with you? Very easy and certain! How do you know that you are alive naturally? By your performance of the functions of life! You eat, and drink, and speak, and walk! So of the soul’s life! Do you pray, and read the Bible, and watch, and strive against sin,—do you hunger and thirst after God? Do you devote yourself, your time, talents, property to Him? No! no! Then you are still DEAD!—dead to God, to heaven, to spiritual things! “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead!” (Eph. v. 14.)

—*Do you hope that you both live and walk in the Spirit?* Then seek to abound more and more. “Don’t count yourself to have attained, or perfect,” &c. (Philip. iii. 12.) Hear Him who says, “Thou shalt see greater things than these.” Like Moses, desire to see more of his glory—who had seen so much. (Exodus xxxiii. 18.) And then let your face shine on all around you, diffuse an odour of sanctity, that men may both see your good works, and drink in of your spirit.

L.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

1 Cor. iv. 20. "*For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.*"

MANY invaluable truths elicited by the wilfulness and insubordination of the early Christians. St. Paul's authority was questioned,—he appeals to his converts as their spiritual father. (Ver. 15.) Some were "puffed up" (ver. 18), but he would come and test the "power" of the rebellious,—which suggested to him the grand truth of the text—"for the kingdom of God is not in word, but in POWER." May that "POWER" be felt among us while we consider—

I. THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

II. A PECULIAR CHARACTERISTIC OF IT.

I. THE KINGDOM OF GOD is an expression applied sometimes to the kingdom of grace, and sometimes to the kingdom of glory. Sometimes indiscriminately to either or both,—and rightly, for one leads to the other,—all who are true members of his kingdom here, will be his subjects hereafter. But it is important, where we can, to use the term definitely.

Here it means the kingdom of grace in this world. Of this kingdom Jesus is King, and his throne is in the hearts of men. "My kingdom is not of this world." (John xviii. 36.) "The kingdom of God is within you." (Luke xvii. 20, 21; Romans xiv. 7.) "The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace," &c. His people "are the children of the kingdom."

—In every human heart another kingdom is by nature established. The dominion of Satan—"The god of this world." (2 Cor. iv. 4.) "The spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." "The prince of the power of the air." (Eph. ii. 2.) They do his works, obey his suggestions, and are unconsciously his slaves.

—The overthrow of this kingdom, and the setting up of the throne of Jesus in the heart is CONVERSION. "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." (Coloss. i. 13.) "The strong man is dethroned, and a

stronger reigns." "We were the servants of sin—now servants to God," &c.

—*Blessed and holy dominion of Christ in the soul!* The reign of holiness and love,—subduing the flesh to the Spirit,—“reigning to righteousness,”—“bringing every thought into subjection,” &c.,—“casting down every high thought.” “It is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” “The love of Christ constraineth”—“casteth out fear”—“fills the soul with righteousness,” &c.

—A kingdom of peace, holiness, and joy,—only disturbed by rebellious nature, which still tries to reign, but cannot.

II. A PECULIAR CHARACTERISTIC OF THIS KINGDOM. “It is not in word, but in power.”

1. It is not in word.

“The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.” “Some had the form of godliness, but denied its power.”

—*It is not a form, a system, not a mere scheme of doctrine.*

—*It is not a mere profession*—a worldly kingdom—mere talk. It is not national, educational, ecclesiastical, merely.

—*It is not propagated by the word, the power, the talent, the eloquence of man;* it is not of human origin, nor sustained by human wisdom.

2. “But it is in power.”

This word “POWER” invites deep consideration,—its import in the evangelical writings is very peculiar, and points to the hidden force, energy, influence, which God puts by his Spirit into his Gospel and into men’s hearts. It is in Christ, and derived from Him. “All power is given unto me in heaven and earth,” “therefore go ye and preach to all nations,” &c.

—“Ye shall receive power,” &c. (Acts i. 8.) “The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.” “To us who are saved it is the power of God,” &c.

The kingdom of God is the mighty power of God. See this—

- (a) *In its promulgation and establishment.* In the first ages, “It came not in word only, but in power, in the Holy Ghost,” &c. (1 Thess. i. 4, 5.) It was not by the preaching of the Gospel alone that the world was converted, but “by the preaching of the Gospel with the Holy Ghost, sent down from heaven.” (1 Peter i. 12.) The same power accompanies the same word now, and has converted thousands of heathen abroad, and of nominal Christians at home. “Not by human might or power, but by my Spirit.”

- (b) *This same POWER alone sustains the work of grace in the soul.* "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." (1 Peter i. 5.) "His power that worketh in us." We read of the "work of faith with POWER." (2 Thess. i. 11 ; Col. i. 11—13, and 29 ; Rom. xv. 13.) The kingdom of God in our hearts is the power, influence, dominion of Christ, working in us continually by the Holy Ghost,—and nothing less !
- (c) *To the same mysterious and energetic force or power our final glorification is attributed.* Jesus will come again in power and great glory,—and by the same power will call the dead from their graves, and clothe his people in their resurrection bodies. (Philip. iii. 21.) "The glory of his power." (2 Thess. i. 7—10.) From first to last the calling, conversion, sanctification, and glorification of the sinner is but a display of this principle—*The power of God to save !*

—*Now, is this kingdom set up in your heart ?* There is a king there ! —a dominion !—a master !—Who is it ? Answer—"His servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or obedience unto righteousness." God or Mammon—Christ or Belial—sin or holiness reign in every heart ! What master do you serve ? God give you honesty and faithfulness to decide truly !

—*If sin, Satan, the world* be your masters—your wages are death and perdition.

—*If Christ, the Lord, by the Spirit,* live and reign in you—it is peace now, and glory hereafter ! Oh that the captives of Satan might be delivered, and the servants of God might rejoice and triumph !

LI.

CHARITY.

1 Corinthians xiii. 13. "*But the greatest of these is charity.*"

HOW great then, must charity be ! FAITH is a noble grace—the grace which justifies, unites with Christ, saves us, and upholds us to glory ! And "HOPE," how bright, how blessed, how animating—it cheers in

life, supports in death—but CHARITY is greater still! How great, then, must charity be!

Oh that God may pour that most excellent gift of charity into our hearts by his Holy Spirit, while—

I. WE EXPOSE ITS COUNTERFEITS.

II. EXHIBIT ITS TRUE NATURE.

III. ITS SUPREME EXCELLENCE.

I. Nothing is so frequently imitated or counterfeited as charity. But,

1. It is not mere almsgiving—St. Paul reasons this at length—“May give all our goods to feed the poor,” and be totally destitute of charity. (Ver. 3.)

—Money given in ostentation—from party spirit, to uphold a system—or from rivalry, to annoy others, to eclipse others—or to atone for sin—to purchase heaven—or large sums given as a sort of premium for covetousness in trifles—this is not charity.

2. Neither is it mere benevolence of heart and kindness of disposition.

Some men have much of the milk of human kindness—and amiable as this is, and excellent as kindred qualities are in themselves, they may exist without charity; which is a spiritual affection.

3. Neither is it merely good breeding, which has been defined to be “benevolence in trifles.”

This is a specious counterfeit—it chooses the lowest place—exercises petty self-denial—exalts another—avoids giving pain—seeks to please—displays amenity and kindness—and yet this may be hollow mannerism, destitute of all grace; and may be displayed by one whose heart is false, carnal, selfish, and the very opposite of the outward action.

4. Much less is it that principle of liberality so popular in our day, which arises from real indifference.

Men admire something which is called charity in religion only because they do not care sufficiently about it to be in earnest. One religion, in their estimation, is as good as another, so a person be sincere. This is an ungodly and unbelieving maxim.

The false charity of the world assumes these and many kindred forms.

II. SEE THE TRUE NATURE OF CHARITY.

1. It is of Divine origin, and springs out of the bosom of God himself.

"CHARITY" is LOVE—Divine love—the very love with which God the Father loves God the Son! (John xvii. 23—26.) With that love Christ loves his people, and they love Him and each other. So (1 John iv. 7—11, 16) it is of the very nature of God himself, comes down from heaven—is God's special gift. Therefore we pray in the Collect,—“Send thine Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift.” It is not a refinement of any earthly affection, however pure—it is altogether new, heavenly, and no spark of it dwells in any living man by nature.

2. See it in its operations.

- (a) *Towards God.* It fills the soul with ineffable delight in Him! “Delight thyself in the Lord,” &c. (Psalm xxxvii. 4.) *It subdues the will to entire and sweet submission to the will of God*—the will of one who loves and is loved—it softens every trial, works submission, resignation; it sees love in everything, and it surrenders the entire heart, will, affections to the will and purpose of God. Therefore it is that “love is the fulfilling of the law”—“that love keeps the commandments”—because love is obedience! Because we love Him, therefore we obey Him.
- (b) *Towards man.—Towards brethren,*—the Church, and God's image in his people. “Loveth him that is begotten of Him.” (1 John v. 1.) *Passively,*—“Beareth all things,” &c. “Puts on bowels of mercies, long-suffering,” &c. (Col. iii. 12.) “Forgiving one another,” &c. (Eph. iv. 31, 32.) How much love will endure from mistaken, prejudiced, unkind brethren, for Christ's sake. *Actively,*—Love sets itself to work for the good of the brethren,—self-denying labour diffusing the truth,—warning the inconsistent,—cheering the faint,—promoting the welfare and peace of the Church. —*Towards the ungodly world—passively,*—Like Christ, “being defamed, we entreat.” (1 Peter ii. 23, and 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.) *Actively,*—In all efforts for the improvement, elevation, and conversion of men. True love nerves the missionary, sends the benevolent into the dens of infamy and misery to reclaim them,—no bounds to its operation.

III. WHY THIS IS THE MORE EXCELLENT GRACE,—“the greatest of these is charity.”

1. Because it partakes of the nature of God. Faith and hope are the graces of a dependant, if not a sinful creature,—but love is of the nature of

God himself. God can neither believe nor hope,—but He loves! and is love!

2. Charity finishes and perfects all other graces,—gives tone and beauty to them.

3. Charity is a social grace. Faith and hope are in our own hearts—hidden—and benefit ourselves only; but charity, love, benefits all.

4. Above all, charity is immortal! Faith and hope die with us, “but charity never faileth.” (Ver. 8.) When faith and hope cease, then love is perfected, and shines to all eternity, receiving continual augmentation, and reflecting its odour of sanctity back upon God himself! “Heaven is love!”

How deficient are most of us in this heavenly grace!
—How earnestly should we covet it! (xiv. 1.) “Follow after charity:”
how diligently seek it at the hand of God!

—*Aids to its development*—meditation, prayer, public and private,—spiritual fellowship,—communion,—the Holy Scriptures, &c.

LII.

THE COVENANTS.

Jeremiah xxxiii. 20, 21. “*Thus saith the Lord; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant.*”

THE BIBLE professes to be a revelation from God of things unseen and unknown,—about God, eternity, man’s soul and its salvation,—and especially of the faithfulness of God in all.

—But the Bible refers us to another book—the book of nature, which we can see and examine,—to God in his works,—and bids us see his faithfulness *there*, that we may believe his faithfulness in what we cannot see or examine,—in other words, *The covenant of grace, illustrated and confirmed by the covenant of nature!*

I. THE COVENANT OF GRACE. To reveal this to man is the object of inspiration from Genesis to Revelation !

1. Trace the successive covenants of God with his people.

With Adam (Genesis iii. 15),—"The seed of the woman," &c. With Noah (Genesis ix. 9),—"I establish my covenant with you." More and more plainly with Abraham (Genesis xii. 3),—"In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Again and again. Thus (Genesis xvii. 2), "I will make my covenant between me and thee," &c. ; also, ver. 4, 7, 8. Afterwards with Moses and Israel, in Egypt, in the wilderness, in Canaan. By sacrifice, Sabbath, ordinances. By long line of prophets. In David and his seed, as (Isaiah lv. 3) "an everlasting covenant—even the sure mercies of David." This is the covenant of text and context. (Chap. xxxi. 31—34, *cum* Ezekiel xxxvi.)

2. All this realized and perfected in Christ.

This is proved at length in the Epistle to the Hebrews. (See Hebrews vi. 13—20.) The identity of the Abrahamic covenant with the covenant of grace. Proved further by viii. 6—13 ; "The new covenant ;" identified again with Christ (xiii. 20) ; "The blood of the everlasting covenant," &c.

3. By this covenant of God He was pledged to offer a sacrifice and atonement for the whole world.

"Propitiation for sins of the whole world." (1 John ii. 2.) "God so loved the *world*, that He gave his only begotten Son," &c. (John iii. 16.) "Because we thus judge that if Christ died for all, then were all dead," &c. (2 Cor. v. 14, 15.) This atonement, this salvation, is to be offered to "every creature."

4. By this covenant He secured the effectual salvation of his people,—that is, of all true believers.

"Those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels of honour," &c. (Article XVII.) These the Father gave to the Son (John xvii. 2) "whom thou hast given Him,"—ver. 6, ver. 9, ver. 20, &c. "That according to the foreknowledge of God," &c. (1 Peter i. 2, &c. ; Romans viii. 29—39.) Doctrines which may beget presumption in some, and despair in others—if *abused*, "but full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons." (Article XVII.) This is the "covenant of grace."

II. THE BIBLE POINTS US TO GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN HIS WORKS, AS

AN ILLUSTRATION AND RATIFICATION OF HIS FAITHFULNESS TO HIS WORD. What He is in the material world, which we can see and examine, that He will be in the spiritual world, which we cannot see.

1. His covenant with the earth.

That which philosophers call Nature and her laws, is only God in his works,—the works are his, and the laws are his.

—*See him in creation.* (Genesis i. and ii.) The laws of matter, vegetation, production, and reproduction, unchanged and unchangeable. Interrupted by deluge—uniformity restored by special covenant with Noah. (Genesis viii. 21, 22.) “While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, &c., shall not cease.” (ix. 9, 10.) Four thousand years and more rolled by and the covenant is not broken. So “it shall accomplish what I please.” (Isaiah lv. 10, 11.) So in the text, and context, and parallel passages. “If ye can break my covenant of the day, &c.” And “If my covenant be not with day and night,” &c. (Ver. 25.) And in chap. xxxi. 32, 33,—having spoken of our new covenant of grace, he ratifies it thus,—“Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day,” &c. (Ver. 35, 36.)

—*That is, the laws of nature given by their Creator, are unchangeable.* All modern science confirms this truth. The telescope, which reveals the wonders of distant worlds,—the microscope, which discovers the infinitude of objects too small for man’s eye,—geology, disentombing witnesses from the interior of the earth,—physical geography,—every branch of natural science confirms God’s covenant with the earth. Laws which cannot be broken are given to earth, sea, skies!

2. Now, what God is in his works, He will be in his Word.

His covenants cannot be broken—cannot fail. “Hath He said, and shall He not do it? hath He spoken,” &c. (Numbers xxiii. 19.) If one can fail, so may the other! If you can stop the sun in his course, or the wheels of time, or the wings of the wind,—if seasons fail,—then God’s Word may fail! But if not—then all that is written of hell, of heaven, of time and eternity, of judgment to come, of death, of life, of salvation, of eternal glory, is firm as the laws of the visible earth! Nay more so,—“For heaven and earth shall pass away, but his Word shall not pass away!”

1. *What solemn warning to the sinner!* Everything you look upon,—each bursting and fading leaf,—each tree, and shrub, and flower, and weed, whose seed is in itself,—tells of an unchangeable God! See,

and read, and learn ! Trifle not,—but while the faithful One offers you mercy, lay hold of it, or you will find Him faithful in judgment.

2. *What abundant consolation to the believer !* All nature echoes back the truthfulness of Him, “who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever !” “The God who cannot lie—who keepeth his covenant for ever.” What repose for the soul of the believer ! Everything changes but his God ! “All the promises in Him are Yea.” (2 Cor. i. 20.) Safe in Christ ! A covenant of love which cannot be broken. “A strong consolation !” “Yea, when flesh and heart fail, God is the strength of our heart and our portion for ever.”

LIII.

THE CHARACTER AND PORTION OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

Psalm xcvii. 10, 11. “*Ye that love the Lord, hate evil : he preserveth the souls of his saints, he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.*”

WALK through the Old Testament with the light of the New. This whole Psalm is a prophecy of Christ. The excellency and glory of his kingdom—the character and blessedness of his people. Ver. 1—“the isles ; the Gentiles.” Ver. 2—6—the glories of his second advent. Ver. 8—the Church’s joy. Ver. 9—the Church’s adoration. Then the ext, the character and blessed portion of his people.

I. THE CHARACTER, OR DESCRIPTION OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

1. They are “THE RIGHTEOUS.” (Ver. 11.)

A generic term,—a righteous God will have a righteous people. Equally true in the sense of perfection and sinlessness,—that “there is none righteous ; no, not one,”—but, as contrasted with the wicked, they are righteous, and to be thus distinguished.

2. They are his saints (ver. 10),—

—His sanctified ones, set apart, dedicated to Him. A term of reproach in the world,—to be “a saint” is to be a hypocrite, in the cant of fashion,—but it is “the highest style of man !” “His saints,”

his own chosen ones, "loved from the foundation of the world," called, converted, adopted as sons, kept by his power unto final salvation. (See Art. XVII.) Made holy, sanctified by the Spirit, taught, comforted, edified, "led by the Spirit." "Saint" is a term not peculiar to the servants of God of the Old and New Testament, but a definition of every one who is in a state of salvation.

3. "UPRIGHT IN HEART."

Christian integrity, how excellent! The world affects it, talks much of honour, virtue, justice, high-mindedness,—a shallow, blustering spirit,—and one of their own has said, "Every man has his price!" But the Christian is "upright in heart," in his inner man, simplicity, self-denying integrity, which seeks not man's applause, resisting temptation, strong in the grace of God.

4. "THEY LOVE THE LORD."

Love, glowing, tender, affectionate, pure, as the love of God, whence it springs—casting out fear, terror, and everything that separates from a loving Father,—this is the love of believers. The first and great commandment, "Thou shalt love,"—and the second like unto it, "Thou shalt love," "for love is the fulfilling of the law." (Matt. xxii. 36—38, and Rom. xiii. 10.) They love God, and therefore love his people, his house, his Sabbaths, his Word, and all his ordinances.

5. "THEY HATE EVIL."

This follows of moral necessity,—they who love must hate; if they love God they must hate evil, because they cannot serve two masters so different from each other. (Matt. vi. 24.) In proportion as they love the one they will hate the other. Sin, evil, unrighteousness, impurity, unbelief, are all dreadful in their eyes,—the new nature in them "abhors that which is evil, and cleaves to that which is good." (Rom. xii. 9.) Sin is the enemy which disturbs their peace, stops their mouth in prayer (Psalm lvi. 18), separates from God; so they must ever hate it.

II. THE BLESSED PORTION OF SUCH PEOPLE. This is indicated by their very titles. If they are "the righteous," "God's saints," "upright in heart," if they "love the Lord," and if they "hate evil," it is because God hath wrought all this in them,—every one of them will say, "By the grace of God I am what I am!" (1 Cor. xv. 10.) And this portion is enough, and a blessed one,—“the inheritance of his saints,”—

"the felicity of his chosen." (Psalm cvi. 5, Prayer-book version.) But there are special blessings here.

1. "HE PRESERVETH THE SOULS OF HIS SAINTS:"—

Not to the exclusion of their bodies, which are his care in this world, "the temples of his Spirit" (1 Cor. vi. 19), and in death they sleep in hope of his resurrection and final glory,—but because the soul is the nobler part "He preserveth them."

—*This implies danger*,—many perils here to the soul.

—*It implies that they cannot preserve their own souls*,—with all care, vigilance, prayer, faith, love, the soul is a helpless thing without God.

—*Many precious promises to this effect*,—see St. Paul's confidence (2 Tim. i. 12),—"He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him," &c., and (iv. 17, 18) "The Lord shall deliver me," &c. "He restoreth my soul." (Psalm xxiii. 3.) "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." (1 Peter i. 5.) "Holy Father, keep, through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me," &c. (John xvii. 11.) "He preserveth the souls of his saints."

2. "HE DELIVERETH THEM OUT OF THE HAND OF THE WICKED."

This implies that they are surrounded by the wicked, and as it were, in their hands,—and so they are. Satan, as a roaring lion, seeks to devour them, desires "to have them, and sift them," or he ensnares them with his "wiles" and "devices,"—he puts evil into their hearts, and leads them astray. His people, too, "the children of the wicked one," do his work on earth, by persecuting his people, tempting them to sin, "putting the bottle to them," and suggesting pollution,—and then, if they succeed, they mock them, as the devils do!

—"He delivereth them out of their hands." That is enough. God looks on—He sees all—"He restrains the wrath of the wicked"—He makes a way by which his people escape,—"I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves!" But the good Shepherd keeps them,—he frustrates the devices of the Evil One. But they often exclaim, "If the Lord had not been on our side," &c. (Psalm cxxiv. 1, 2.)

3. Their final blessedness,—"**LIGHT IS SOWN FOR THE RIGHTEOUS, AND GLADNESS FOR THE UPRIGHT IN HEART.**"

Beautiful figure: this life is often a time of darkness, but it is the seed-time of light. When the believer is sowing dark tears, sighs, sorrows, trials, temptations, all is cheerless; but these are seeds of light! "Light is sown for him,"—it will come up,—it will shine forth by and by,—it may be a long winter, and a backward spring,

and even harvest time may be cheerless,—but it will come at last !
 “Sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning !”
 (Psalm xxx. 5, and John xvi. 20—22.)

If you would have the believer’s “PORTION,” you must bear the believer’s “CHARACTER.” Study these definitions of the people of the Lord,—rest not until you can appropriate them, and then “all things are yours.”

LIV.

MOTIVES FOR DILIGENCE.

Ecclesiastes ix. 10. *“Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.”*

THE exact sense in which the wise man intended these words to be taken may be doubtful. He seems to invite men to enjoy themselves while they can, with their bread, and their wine, and their wives, for such “is their portion under the sun !” But the vision of death in the text was not likely to enhance their pleasure ! And the previous context, all looks the same way. “A living dog is better than a dead lion.” (Ver. 4.) “The dead are forgotten, and their love and hatred are buried with them !” (Ver. 5, 6.) Certainly we may apply the striking considerations of the text as stimulants to the highest duties ; and may God solemnize our minds, while we consider—

I. THE AFFECTING TRUTHS SUGGESTED.

II. THE PRACTICAL INFERENCE DEDUCIBLE FROM THEM.*

* Remember, in preaching to a country or uneducated congregation, that probably the five principal words in these two heads will be totally incomprehensible to the hearers ! Alter them thus—I. THE SAD OR SORROWFUL FACTS. II. THE LESSONS WE MAY LEARN FROM THEM.

I. THE AFFECTING TRUTHS SUGGESTED.

1. That we are going towards the grave.

—*Behold the sure end of the journey of life*,—"The grave." The grave! What is it? Why dread it? A green turf, a coffin, a winding-sheet—narrow, lonely dwelling! Within, corruption and the worm. (Job iii. 17—19.) "Small and great are there." And "I have said to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister." (xvii. 14.) "The way of all flesh." Why dread its quiet bed? Because of sin, because of judgment—of the second death—what is beyond? Where is the soul? "The sting of death is sin."

—*Affecting thought! we are all going there!* "Whither thou goest!" No exception! true of every living man! True of the newborn babe: the first breath is the first step towards the grave. Where are you going? Towards honour, wealth, fame? and then where? Towards the grave. On, and on, and on! step by step, day by day, pilgrims ever journeying, never stopping; sleep stays us not,—we dream—but awake, and find ourselves so much nearer the grave! "As thy soul liveth there is but a step between me and death." "Your fathers, where are they?" &c.

2. One striking characteristic of this goal.

"There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest." As it respects this life, and its influence on the next, all is over! Work left undone, is undone for ever. "Death cannot praise thee," &c. (Isaiah xxxviii. 18, 19.) And in the New Testament—"Work while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work." (John ix. 4.)

—*A believer's season of usefulness is ended.* Now he can speak for God to sinners,—now he can spend time, and money, and strength, and thought to promote God's glory and the salvation and happiness of his creatures. But in the grave what can he do? The preacher's voice is silenced,—the loving eye of the godly mother is stiff, and cold, and blind,—brother, sister, friend—ah! they answer not,—the day of active love and mercy is over!—gone!

—*The day of grace for the sinner is ended!* Now he may seek the Lord and find Him,—"even from thence"—from the lowest pit of misery, sin, shame, sorrow—he may come to Christ and find peace,—but the curtain drops, the door is shut, his state is fixed for ever! He is there—whence no fabled masses, alms, or prayers can rescue him—"where hope never comes." As he dies, so he is for ever! A moral necessity, not a mere dogma! As the tree falls so it lies,—*"In the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be."* (Chap. xi. 3.) "He that is filthy, is filthy still." (Rev. xxii. 11.)

The miser, the gambler, the drunkard, the licentious, the ungodly, the unholy, the wicked—overtaken, “die in their sins,”—and how shall they ever get rid of them ?

II. THE PRACTICAL INFERENCE DRAWN FROM THESE SOLEMN THOUGHTS. “Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” An exhortation of universal application. No need to apply it to things of this world, or its devotees. “A short life, and merry one !” “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.” These are their mottoes—their proverbs. The lovers of wealth labour as if they knew the time is short : and the busy world bustles on, as if they would crowd the work of a week into a day. But this is not our work ! “For what end were we born ?”

1. To “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.”

This is the great object and end of this life—“to save our souls alive,”—to escape the wrath to come. Born in sin, to be born again, to be converted, renewed—to learn the truth, and accept it—to believe in Jesus—to obey Him, serve Him, &c. Now then, “do it with thy might !” You have but a short time, and it is a great work,—a race—a battle, a pilgrimage ! Beware lest you fall into your grave before you are ready !

2. But sent into this world to live, not to ourselves, but to God,—to his glory.

Great social duties and responsibilities—domestic, public, national, foreign ! A tide of misery, sin, folly, ruin, rolling around and sweeping thousands to destruction—and what do we to save them ? At home, abroad, in Christian lands, in pagan countries—what do we ? Stay your hand ? Slothful, careless, indifferent, hopeless, desponding ? Oh ! awake, arise, call upon God, shake off these delusions. See, the grave is already dug for you—a step or two and you stumble into it—and oh how much work is undone ! “Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might”—heartily, earnestly, diligently—with self-denial—for there is nothing to be done in “the grave whither thou goest !”

[This subject is applicable to any benevolent cause, to missionary or domestic work.]

LV.

THE BETTER RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Matthew v. 20. "*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*"

IF truth be told there are persons who in their hearts, desire to know how little religion will save them! Of the wickedness of such a thought, and the libel which it casts on a merciful God and his blessed service, we will not now speak; but we will furnish such persons with an answer to the thought of their heart: we cannot exactly say how much or how little religion may win or lose the soul, but here is one test for you, from Christ himself—you must have more religion, and a better religion than the Pharisees had, or you cannot be saved. Let us examine this point more closely, and may God give us wisdom from on high.

I. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES.

II. HOW WE MUST EXCEED IT.

III. THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY FOR DOING SO.

I. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES. This is so often condemned by our Lord that what was really good in it may have been overlooked.

—*They laboured hard*, and worked, and toiled, and fasted, and prayed, to save their souls. See our Lord's own picture of one of them. "He was not an extortioner, nor an adulterer, nor unjust—he fasted twice a-week, and gave alms of all he possessed." (Luke xviii. 11.) Much more religion this, than many of us can boast!

—*The Pharisees revered and studied the Scriptures*—they showed acquaintance with the prophecies, commandments, &c. (Compare Deut. vi. 8, 9, with Matt. xxiii. 5.)

—*They were very zealous for their religion.* "I bear them record," says St. Paul, "that they have a zeal for God." (Rom. x. 2.) "They stirred heaven and earth to make proselytes." (Matt. xxiii. 15.)

—*They carefully observed many of the laws of Moses*, specially of the Sabbath, though they added to them vain traditions.

—*They were frequent in prayer*—liberal in alms. (Matt. vi. 2.)

St. Paul calls it "the most straitest sect" of the Jews' religion, and numbers of them were not "hypocrites," &c.

—*Yet as a body or class of men our Lord, John the Baptist, and the disciples, condemned none other so strongly!* Matt. iii. 7, "Generation of vipers," &c., and xxiii., through the whole chapter.

II. IN WHAT RESPECTS, THEN, MUST OUR RELIGION, OR RIGHTEOUSNESS, EXCEED THEIRS? In every respect, theoretically and practically.

1. Their religion was principally ceremonial, formal, external; not of the heart and spirit:—

—Certain prayers were to be said, certain sacrifices offered, ceremonies to be performed, and works and duties to be done—there was little respect to the heart, the spirit, the inner man! In this we must exceed and surpass them. Ours must be a religion of the heart, of the spirit—not of form, but of power. Forms, ceremonies, external observances to be only as means to an end.

2. In all they did, they courted the observation and sought the praise of men!

This is poison to any religion! To do alms and pray, long and publicly, in order to be "called good," and to make religion a means of gaining human flattery, is abomination in the sight of God. "Thou, when thou prayest, enter thou into thy closet," &c. (Matt. vi. 6.)

—In this excel them. Many in our own day come to church and say their prayers, and go through certain forms only because it is the custom, or respectable, or because they would be blamed if they did not. That is the Pharisee's religion.

3. The fundamental error of the Pharisees was self-righteousness.

"Ye are they who justify yourselves," &c. (Luke xviii. 9.) "Trusted in themselves that they were righteous," &c. If they had laboured yet more, and given all their property in alms, and prayed all day long, and after all believed that by these and other good works they could be saved, their services would be and were abomination to God.

—*In this, above all, must we exceed their righteousness*—we must have a better, even that of Christ alone, to justify us before God. "Ignorant of God's righteousness," &c. (Rom. x. 3, *cum* ix. 31—33.) Instead of this we "must put on Christ's." (See again Rom. iii. 19—31, and iv. 1—8.)

4. Yet once more must we exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees in the renunciation of sin and the practice of self-denial.

A great error to suppose that anything is wrong because the Pharisees did it ! They did a great many things good and excellent and proper, but from mistaken or bad motives. We must do the same things from better motives. We must "not be adulterers, nor unjust," &c., as they were not ; and we must pray, and read, and fast, and be zealous, and outwork them in every good thing—from pure and spiritual and Gospel motives. Not to be seen of men, not to justify ourselves, but to show our love to Him who has saved and justified us.

III. THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF THIS.

1. Note the character of the speaker, the solemnity of his manner !

Throughout this sermon Jesus assumed unwonted authority and dignity of speech. He not only expounds the law of God given at Sinai, but He sets his own authority beside it, and upon it, as its equal. Again and again—"It was said by them of old time," &c. "BUT I SAY UNTO YOU," &c. God spake, and I spake ! I, the future Judge of quick and dead—now in humiliation expounding the law—then to administer it ! "I say unto you !"

2. And what does He say ?

—"That except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven." How strong, urgent, decided ! You must have a better religion, you must be better men, and be actuated by purer, higher, more scriptural principles than they, or you shall "in no case," under no circumstances, or by any other means, enter the kingdom of heaven ! Oh, what a solemn warning !

1. *Address those who are conscious that they fall short even of the religion of the Pharisees.* You are not free from the vices which they shunned, and you neglect the duties which they performed ! Oh ! most perilous state ! "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly appear ?"

2. *Those who hope they come up to the Pharisees' religion, and are disposed to be contented with it !* How great is your danger—your religion is a delusion, a subterfuge—the light which is in you is darkness ! You will share the condemnation of the Pharisees, unless your heart be changed and converted to God.

3. *To those who hope they have a better righteousness than that of the Pharisees*—I say, be sure you excel them in works as much as in faith ! Let your superior practice, godliness, charity, prove to all men that you have a more enlightened faith in your heart.

LVI.

THE LETTER KILLS, THE SPIRIT GIVES LIFE.

2 Cor. iii. 6. *"For the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."*

IMPORTANT to ascertain the mind of the apostle in these words—often misunderstood. What is the "LETTER," and what the "SPIRIT," with which it is contrasted? And how does the letter kill, and the Spirit give life? Some say the "letter" means the law, or the Mosaic dispensation, and "the Spirit" the Gospel; but this agrees neither with the facts of the case nor the sense of the context: the law saved many, and the Gospel kills many—the law, therefore, could not be identical with the letter which always kills! Besides, the context shows that the apostle means the "New Testament," or new covenant, which, if received in the letter only, always kills, but if in the Spirit, gives life. Examination will show that the assertion is equally true also of the old dispensation; or, in a word, with REVELATION, in every shape. Let us search into this subject more deeply, and consider—

I. THE LETTER THAT KILLETH.

II. THE SPIRIT WHICH GIVETH LIFE.

I. REVELATION RECEIVED ONLY IN THE LETTER, OR, LITERALLY, FORMALLY, ALWAYS BROUGHT DEATH.

1. See this in the earlier dispensations.

—The simplest form of worship was spiritual death to one of the worshippers—Cain! In Patriarchal worship and sacrifice "all did not see the day of Christ"—all were not true worshippers. Sacrifice

was a burden and a useless form to many : See Ishmael, Esau, and Joseph's brothers.

—*In the Mosaic dispensation* it was condemnation to many. *The moral law* killed many—rather by exciting the enmity of unholy hearts, as at the foot of Sinai, or as made a ground of self-righteous acceptance with God—"made broad their phylacteries," &c. (Matt. xxiii. 5.)

—*The ceremonial law* killed—either by their rejection of it and preference for idolatrous rites, or by the minute blind and slavish observance of it, without faith in the Antitype—they were ritualists, formalists, and "the letter killed them," condemned them.

—*So also the prophetic Scriptures killed them* : they read the letter of them—the written prediction—and there stood the Accomplishment—"This is He of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write" (John i. 45)—but they could not see Him ! "The letter killed them !" "That Moses in whom they trusted," condemned them !

2. This equally true under the Gospel.

—*The peculiar doctrines of the Gospel prove to be death to many.* Salvation by grace, through faith—conversion—justification—imputed righteousness—the vicarious sufferings of Christ—offend pride, and self-righteous philosophy, and so kill ; or they are received only in letter, theory, dogma, being inoperative on heart and life.

—*The Bible read in the letter only kills.* It condemns many who read it as students, scholars, critics ; or educationally, formally, without prayer.

—*The preaching of the Gospel* "is a savour of death unto death to some" (2 Cor. ii. 16), and "foolishness" to others (1 Cor. i. 18), and so "kills them."

—*Holy sacraments kill*—when unworthily received, or superstitiously relied upon : "their letter," their form, destitute of power, destroys the soul.

—So of Christian education, and every moral and religious advantage, if received and used in a mere perfunctory manner, increases men's condemnation, and so "kills them : " in proportion to their light. (Hebrews ii. 1—4.)

II. THE SPIRIT GIVETH LIFE : the great general truth, that the Spirit, the Holy Ghost, is the author and giver of all spiritual life. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth ; the flesh," or the letter, "profiteth nothing." No man hath quickened his own soul. But we must see how the Spirit worked life to some through those means which were death to others.

1. Thus, under the earlier dispensation :

—If Abel “offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain,” we know it was “by faith :” and that faith was the work of God’s Spirit on the soul. If Enoch “walked with God”—if Abraham “saw the day of Christ”—if Moses “chose the reproach of Christ”—and if through the ceremonies the pious Jew looked on to a coming Messiah, it was through the Spirit teaching them.

—*If the moral law* “was a schoolmaster, and brought men to Christ, it was because “their children were taught of God.” (Isaiah liv. 13.) If the *ceremonial* of Moses led on beyond the letter of it to the good things to come, it was by the same Teacher.

—In all these successive forms and ordinances the Spirit of God met men’s souls and quickened them, and so “gave life.” Hence all the ancient saints had the same penitence, faith, love, holiness, self-denial, and converse with God, as those under the New Testament. Not the same light, but the same experience. (Romans ii. 28, 29.)

2. Just so under the Gospel ; but with more power, light, life, and energy, because it is “the dispensation or ministration of the Spirit.” (2 Cor. iii. 8.) “The dispensation of the grace of God.” (Ephes. iii. 2.)

—*In the preaching of the Word*—the dead letter is kindled into life by the Spirit. “It comes not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost,” &c. (1 Thess. i. 5.) It is “the Word of God, made quick and powerful” by the Spirit : “when preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.”

—*In the study of the Holy Scriptures*—the dead letter of the lifeless page is animated, and imparts light and life and truth, and comfort and salvation to the soul, by “the same Spirit.”

—*In the holy sacraments*—there is no necessary and unavoidable grace—but when God hears the prayers of pious parents, or when as a Sovereign He sends his mighty Spirit down, his own ordinance becomes life from the dead. And when in the other sacrament the Spirit quickens, faith “discerns the Lord’s body,” eats and lives ! In all cases the mere letter kills—but when charged with the Spirit it gives life and salvation.

What is the Gospel of the grace of God to you ? A letter that kills, or a Spirit that gives life ?

LVII.

THE WAY OF ACCESS.

Ephesians ii. 18. "*For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*"

GOD revealed to us in holy Scripture under the most endearing characters. He is more faithful and tender than a young mother to her sucking child. "Can a woman forget her sucking child," &c. (Isaiah xlix. 15.) His people are to Him as "a brother, or sister, or mother." (Matt. xii. 48.) But more frequently as a father—and not only as "a father," but as "our Father in Christ Jesus."

May his love here revealed to us touch our hearts through his Holy Spirit. See Him here described as—

I. A FATHER BEREAVED OF HIS CHILDREN. When the Apostle says, that through Christ we both have access unto the Father, it is necessarily implied that we were not only separated, but that there was no way for us to return.

GOD is a universal FATHER. He has an innumerable family of holy, sinless, perfect children in heaven.

—*He has also a numerous family of rebellious children*—once, too, spirits in glory—now *devils*, fallen ones,—for whom, as far as we know, no way of access is provided.

—*He created our first parents holy children*, and placed them in paradise, but they also fell from their innocence—became rebellious, wicked children, "very far gone from original righteousness,"—being then, like the fallen spirits, alienated from God—separated—without inclination or power to return.

—*Fix on this one character of fallen man entailed on Adam's remotest posterity*—"SEPARATION!" There is a great gulf between God and man, illustrated in all his history. What was it that hid our first parents among the trees? *Separation!* What was their expulsion from paradise? *Separation!* This pervades all hearts in all time, ages, and generations. All are not equally wicked, abandoned, but all are *separated*,—all are by nature without God—do not love Him—desire Him—seek Him—but seek happiness elsewhere. —Even if they desire to return, they know no way of access, and in

their blindness multiply false and delusive ways of approach to God. Nay, even his people are sometimes afraid of Him. (Exodus iii. 6.)—Now, God is ever represented as an affectionate father mourning over the loss of his disobedient children. “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim,” &c. (Hosea xi. 8.) “He saw and wondered that there was no man,” &c. (Isaiah lix. 16.)

II. A WAY OF ACCESS IS DISCOVERED,—“*through Him*”—*through Jesus!*

—*This way was devised and opened by God the Father himself.* This blessed truth constantly affirmed “God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son,” &c. “When he saw that there was no man—then his own arm,” &c. (Isaiah lix. 17.) “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John iv. 10.)

—*That Son of God claims the same love himself.*—He, too, so loved “us that He gave himself for us.” He was not compelled to come, —“Then said I, Lo! I come,” &c. “Though He was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor,” &c. (2 Cor. viii. 9.) And now what is He? “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” “He is that new and living way.” (Heb. x. 20.) Sin atoned for—God reconciled—man redeemed.

—*Consider what that access is!* Whereas all approach to God was barred against sinners, and the “flaming sword” of Divine justice prevented their drawing near to a holy God—now *that* God waits to be gracious, is ready to receive “all who come unto him by Christ Jesus”—all of every nation, “both Jews and Greeks”—all of every character, bad and good—no exception nor exclusion—“every creature,” every fallen human being—all are invited to come, yea to “draw near by the blood of Jesus,” and find peace to their souls! Thus a way of access is abundantly revealed to fallen man.

But III. A GREAT DIFFICULTY YET REMAINS; so fatal is that separation between God and man, that even when a way of access and return to Him from whom he has fallen is made known to man, he cares not to avail himself of it. Man is in danger of perishing, not only because God is offended, wrath awakened, and the way of return closed up, but because the fall has so alienated and separated man’s heart from God, that when a way is opened and return made possible man proudly rejects it. Hence the important words, “*by one Spirit*”—“Through Him we, both Jews and Gentiles, have access by ONE SPIRIT unto the Father.”

—*But for the work of this one Spirit on the heart, not a living soul would seek or find this way of access.* All Scripture affirms this, and all experience attests it. Thousands hear and know of this way, and never seek or find it. They are invited, entreated to enter—but they will not. “No man can come unto me except the Father draw him!”

—*It is the Lord the Spirit*—that “ONE SPIRIT”—(see 1 Cor. xii.)—which alone turns, disposes, inclines the truant heart to seek after God; He “draws us, and we follow”—“He orders the unruly wills and affections of sinful men.”

- (1) *Communion with God is strange to man, he must be taught it.* “Draw me,” &c. (Canticles i. 4.) “The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God,” &c. (2 Thess. iii. 5.)
- (2) *When he has learned it, he needs continual help.* “To help his infirmities.” (Romans viii. 26, &c.)
- (3) *Once established, who can tell how near we may live with God!* Continual access—admission to heaven—“Go in and out and find pasture.” “Praying in the Holy Ghost.” (Jude 20.) And chap. vi. 18—“Praying in the Spirit.” There is our gracious Father—always approachable—the Son pleading for us—the Holy Ghost helping us. How blessed!

—*Are there those who do not know this way of access, who live without prayer and communion with God?* Oh! seek it—rest not till you have found it—the blessedness of prayer!

—*Let all who know this privilege cultivate it!* The habit of prayer, the practice of it, will deepen the experience of its value.

LVIII.

CHRIST ON THE TREE.

1 Peter ii. 24. “*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.*”

SIN may be viewed in many aspects as an accursed thing: its hatefulness in the sight of God—its deadly nature—its consequences; the fruitful source of all misery to man in time and in eternity.

—But where can it be seen as here?—“in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ!” If we would learn “its exceeding sinfulness,” we must behold it in the wounds of Jesus!

I. CONSIDER WHAT THAT BODY WAS, AND WHOSE IT WAS: “His own body on the tree.”

1. It was the body of a man :

—a real man, born of a woman—though “a body prepared from the beginning” (Heb. x. 5)—of our flesh. “The seed of Abraham”—“not the nature of an angel.” Liable to all innocent human infirmities. Bone of our bone—“our brother :” a body that was weary, &c.

2. Yet it was God’s own and only begotten Son :

—who was “equal with God”—one with God—“with him before the worlds.” “He was God.” “God manifest in the flesh.” “Before Abraham was, I am!” Never laid his Godhead by, “but took the manhood unto God.”

3. It was the body of Christ, the Messiah :

—God and man in one Christ—which was laid on the cross.

II. SEE THAT BODY ON THE TREE. Christ upon the cross.

—*Look back over his previous life*—“man of sorrows”—“endured contradiction of sinners against himself”—“had not where to lay his head.”

—*Watch the approaches to the last scenes*—his last discourses (John xiv.—xvii.). The shadow darkened on his brow.

—*Behold Him in Gethsemane*—“his agony and bloody sweat.”

—*Follow Him to the seats of judgment*—High Priest, Herod, Pilate.

—*See Him laid upon the cross*—“lifted up”—his last sentences—He bows his head and dies! Earth trembles, graves open, vail rent, &c.

III. WHAT MEANETH ALL THIS? Why does so glorious, so holy, so good a man thus suffer and die? And one of so mysterious a being and nature?

1. He was bearing our sins in his own body on the tree!

—His own self—his holy precious life—in that sinless body was “a sin-offering.” He was the victim—the substitute for us. He suffered

these wonderful sorrows, because He was bearing the sins of the whole world. "The Lord laid," or caused to meet on Him, "the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah liii. 4—6.) "Cursed is every one who hangeth on a tree"—and "He became that curse for us." "He was made sin for us." (2 Cor. v. 21.) "He was putting away sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Hebrews ix. 26.) All Scripture testifies to this.

2. All his mental and bodily sufferings are then to be traced to our sins.

See what sin has done! See it in every touching incident—our sins wounded, bruised, insulted, scourged, crucified Him! Every sinful act of ours planted a thorn in his brow, &c. Realize this, follow it out through all the details of his life of suffering and death of anguish—it was *all sin, our sin, yours, mine!*

IV. WHAT FORM THEN, DOES SIN NOW ASSUME, AND HOW SHOULD WE REGARD IT?

What must the guilt of sin be which could be expiated by no less a cost than the death of Christ? Tens of thousands of bloody sacrifices had been offered, sprinklings, washings,—types and shadows for 4,000 years—and now their terrible import was proved in the agonies of God's own Son! What must be the malignity, the consequences, the desert of sin? Nothing proves its direful nature like this!

With what poignancy and tenderness of grief should we mourn over the sins which did all this! I may be sorry for sin because it is wicked, because it offends my God, because it destroys my soul—but all this is as nothing compared to my sorrow, because it bruised and wounded and slew the Son of God! When I see my sins torturing Him, then I mourn indeed.

With what righteous indignation must I fight against it! (2 Cor. vii. 11.) Mortify it, crucify it, abjure it—die daily to it—"I am crucified with Christ," &c. This the special object *here*—"that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness," &c. There is virtue in his wounds to enable me to die to sin, and live unto righteousness.

With what believing confidence should we receive the atonement! Is it not enough? "HIS OWN BODY!" such a costly sacrifice—"The Lamb of God"—"God's own Son"—God's own providing. Sin is great, but Christ is greater. The guilt of the whole world enormous—but the merit, virtue, atonement, righteousness of this Divine ransom exceeds.

Should we not be anxious to make this great salvation known at home and abroad : to tell of a sin-bearing Saviour to every sinner !

[Here any cause tending to promote Christ's Gospel might be advocated.]

LIX.

THE ASCENSION.

Hebrews ix. 24. "*For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true ; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.*"

OUR blessed Lord, in his personal ministry, never explained the typical nature of the ceremonial law—He complied with its injunctions, and fulfilled them : but the time was not yet for their interpretation. It was some years after the death of Christ before his Church comprehended these things ; and St. Paul wrote this Epistle for ever to settle the question, and to prepare the Church for the final abolition of the Mosaic dispensation. Fresh views of Christ and his glory are thus revealed to us. May we have eyes to see them.

I. HERE IS CHRIST'S ASCENSION INTO HEAVEN.

II. THE OBJECTS WHICH HE THERE PURSUES.

I. This event He predicted in his lifetime : "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before," &c. (John vi. 62.) And again : "I came forth from the Father . . . again, I leave the world and go unto the Father." (John xvi. 28.)

1. Contemplate this sublime event.

How simply told by two Evangelists, and in the Acts of the Apostles. "He was received up into heaven," &c. (Mark xvi. 19, 20.) "It came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven !" (Luke xxiv. 50—53.) "A cloud

received him out of their sight." (Acts i. 9.) How any can doubt that heaven is a place—apart from this world, somewhere else, where God is, and where holy angels are, is marvellous. In fact, if it is not so, such language is calculated to deceive us!

2. See his session at the right hand of God!

His present majesty and glory—"King of kings," "Lord of lords"—heaven and earth and hell at his feet. "At the right hand of God exalted." (Acts ii. 33—36.) "Whom the heavens must receive," &c. (iii. 21.) There the dying Stephen saw Him. (Acts vii. 55, 56.) And there the beloved John saw Him. (Rev. i. 12—18.) And there St. Paul declares, that in Him now already all his elect sit: "Who hath made us sit together in heavenly places by Christ Jesus!" (Ephes. ii. 6.) So in our text—"into heaven itself"—"Who is gone into heaven," &c.

3. This great event attested by many witnesses: some of whom saw it themselves, others had it immediately from them.

Proclaimed on the spot and at the time by many Evangelists, and ratified and confirmed by God himself "with signs following." (Mark xvi. 20.) This is the last great act of redemption. The crisis of the judgment to come alone remains. There He is, "and expecting until his foes be made his footstool."

II. THE OBJECTS WHICH HE STILL PURSUES: "He appears in the presence of God for us"—still for us—doing our work, seeking complete salvation.

1. To do, accomplish, and complete for us all that the high priest did, typically, for the people in the holy of holies.

"The sprinkling of blood," &c. (Ver. 14.) The whole Epistle interprets and applies this: the continual presentation of himself.

2. He appears there as our "forerunner" and federal head and representative. (Chap. vi. 20.)

"He is the first fruits of them that sleep." (1 Cor. xv. 20.) He impersonates them—embodies them—they are considered as in Him. (Ephes. i. 20, 21; ii. 6.) All his redeemed are in Him—as "Levi was in the loins of Abraham." (Hebrews vii. 9, 10.)

3. As our everliving advocate and intercessor.

This Gospel work is still continued. "He ever liveth to make intercession for us," and "therefore able to save." (Chap. vii. 25.) "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

(1 John ii. 1.) No more sacrifice, atonement, propitiation—all that is “finished”—but perpetual advocacy lasts to the end.

4. Preparing a place for us in his Father’s house. (John xiv. 1—4.)

“A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (2 Cor. v. 1.) To which He will take us at his second coming: a house certainly not here, not on this earth.

—With what feelings should we contemplate this our glorious and ascended Lord?

—*With profound adoration, wonder, praise, and worship.* Join the heavenly song “with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.”

—*With believing sympathy in his triumphs*—if we have fellowship with his sufferings, so also with his joys: “glorified together!” Oh for faith to see ourselves in Him already glorified! Sharers of his crown—“More than conquerors” in Him. (Rom. viii. 37.)

—*How emulous of a spiritual resurrection and ascension with Him!* “Likeness of his death, likeness of his resurrection.” (Romans vi.) “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek things above, where Christ is.” (Col. iii. 1, 2.) “Our conversation in heaven,” &c. (Philip. iii. 20.) Where is our treasure? In heaven! Where should our hearts be?

—*Should we not watch and wait and look for his glorious second coming?* “He shall so come, as ye have seen him go into heaven,” &c. (Acts i. 11.) “To them that look for him,” &c. (Heb. ix. 28.) “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.” (Rev. xxii. 20.)

LX.

CHRIST PRESENT IN THE CONGREGATION.

Matthew xviii. 20. “*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*”

RELIGION, the life of God in the soul, is a personal, private, individual matter between a man and his God. We are born alone, must die alone, and must “every one of us give an account of himself to God.” (Rom. xiv. 12.) Hence the necessity of *private prayer*: “Enter into thy closet and shut thy doors,—and pray in secret.” (Matt. vi. 6.) All the

public and social services in the world will do us no good without a life with God in secret.

—*But man is also a social being*—a member of a family, of a Church, of society—and therefore his religion and his worship must be social too. His devotions must be congregational as well as private. It is to united prayer, to the saints in communion, that the promise of Christ is made in the text.

I. "WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME,"

II. "THERE AM I IN THE MIDST."

I. 1. The promise is made to a congregation.

The expression two or three is proverbially indefinite,—it necessarily means more than one, and it may mean two or three thousand,—it is public worship.

—*Congregational worship* is the language of nature—displayed in heathen lands. It was illustrated in the whole *Mosaic dispensation*, gloriously,—at Mount Sinai,—in Solomon's temple,—in Ezra's days, &c.

—*Christianity inaugurated by Pentecostal multitude*—3,000 souls converted in one day,—sustained by weekly assemblies,—continued through all the Churches since. (Hebrews x. 25.)

2. The congregation must be assembled "in his name."

This emphatic and important. The context shows that it is a union for prayer. (Ver. 19.) Prayer in the name of Jesus,—prayer to Him,—adoration of Him,—belief in Him. The promise is not to Deists, nor Socinians, nor to the worshippers of images, saints, or inferior intelligences—"but to all who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor. i. 2.) All who bow the knee to Jesus as their Lord and God. It is to a Christian community assembled—to the faithful in Christ Jesus—a communion of saints—that the promise is made.

3. That Congregation may be assembled anywhere.

WHERE *two or three are*—"THERE I am,"—no matter WHERE ! Under the law it was otherwise. In Zion only would God then be worshipped—at Jerusalem—in the temple—before the altar—there and nowhere else. *That* was the peculiarity of that dispensation, but now all places are alike holy. The disciples long assembled of necessity in private houses,—expelled from temples and synagogues,

they worshipped on the sea-shore—in the desert—on the mountain—by the way-side—centuries passed away before Christian edifices were tolerated,—and even now “God dwelleth not in temples made with hands,” but in the hearts of his people; and wherever a praying, believing people are assembled, there Christ is, and there is his Church—the true spiritual temple. (John iv. 20—24.)

II. TO SUCH AN ASSEMBLY IS THE PROMISE MADE—“There am I in the midst.”

1. The nature of this promise indicates the character of Him who made it.

Examine it and wonder! How many thousands of such congregations assembled in the world at the same time. Here are two or three pious souls in prayer,—there a missionary and his little flock, in distant lands, &c.,—yet He says, “There am I in the midst!” Throughout all ages, in all places—no limit. What is this but DEITY—OMNIPRESENCE? “I am that I am.” “The great I AM.” “Before Abraham was, I am.” And this was the carpenter’s son! If Jesus Christ be not, in the highest sense, truly God, He, no doubt, here spoke blasphemy!

2. Mark the blessings entailed by this promise.

The presence of Christ in the assembly of his saints,—invisible, He yet is there: “Lo! I am with you alway.”

—*To diffuse and dispense his favours*,—as He breathed on his disciples and said, “Peace be unto you;” “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you;” “To bind up the broken-hearted,” &c. “To comfort all that mourn.”

—*To give power to his holy Word read and preached*,—that it may not prove “a letter” “to kill,” but “the power of God to salvation.” “Not a savour of death, but of life.” That souls may “be born again by the word of truth.”

—*To give efficacy to his holy Sacraments*—especially to the holy Communion of his body and blood,—that his people may verily and indeed receive Him by faith, and “feed on Him to the strengthening and refreshing of their souls.” “That they may discern the Lord’s body.” (1 Cor. xi. 29.) “That they may find his flesh meat indeed,” &c. (John vi. 55.)

—*By pouring out his Holy Spirit upon pastors and people*. Jesus is not bodily here,—He is away in heaven, in his Father’s house; but He dwells in us, and makes his presence felt by “the Holy Ghost the Comforter.” He is in some sense personally present among us—breathes in our prayers, inspires love to Jesus. and reveals his love to

us. Each individual is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and all together assembled are his Church—his body—in which the Holy Ghost is—“built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.” (Eph. ii. 18—22.)

1. *How solemn and sacred a thing is a congregation of worshippers!* I do not say “a place of worship,” for it is the assembly and not the place they meet in which is sacred. Whether it is in the open air, or in a barn, or a school-house, or a splendid church, matters not,—it is the people, the saints, and the awful presence of God among them, which is so solemn. Christ is there,—“the Lord is there,”—“God is in this place,” whether you know it or not. Be afraid to come thoughtlessly, lightly, carelessly. Oh! the danger, the guilt, the impiety of vain, unholy, worldly men in God’s immediate presence.

2. *How full of unspeakable consolation to the humble, the penitent, the believing!*

—Come together and worship,—come and hear, and read, and sing, and pray,—bring all your cares, sorrows, sins, troubles along with you! Christ is here in his own house and ordinances, to hear, to help, to bless, to save,—to supply all your need, to fill you with joy and peace in believing! “Fear not ye!” He loves you, pities you, cares for you, intercedes for you,—He is very near us—we see Him by faith—“There am I in the midst!”

LXI.

THE BELIEVER'S HIDING-PLACE.

2 Thessalonians iii. 5. “*And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.*” *

THE doctrine of the Holy Trinity in Unity is not taught in Scripture dogmatically, theoretically, or scholastically, as in our creeds and formularies, but experimentally and practically: as here, “THE LORD,”

* Thirty years since I made a sketch on this text, and preached from it several times, inverting this order, as follows:—

This is a prayer. I. CONSIDER SEVERAL IMPORTANT TRUTHS IMPLIED in it: and

the Holy Spirit, "direct your hearts into the love of God" the FATHER, "and into the patient waiting for CHRIST!" So (2 Cor. xiii. 14 :) "The grace of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, and the love of GOD, and the fellowship of the HOLY GHOST, be with you all," &c.; or as in (Ephes. ii. 18 :) "Through Him," CHRIST, "we both have access by ONE SPIRIT unto the FATHER!"

May that Holy Spirit sanctify our meditations, while we consider—

I. WHITHER THE APOSTLE DESIRES THAT OUR HEARTS SHOULD BE DIRECTED,—“into the love of God,”—and “into the patient waiting for Christ.”

II. HOW HE PRAYS THAT THEY MAY BE GUIDED THERE “BY THE LORD.”

I. 1. “Into the love of God :” as into some given place of rest, security, peace, and happiness—a dwelling for our hearts—an object of supreme affection. “We dwell in love—we dwell in God.” (1 John iv. 16 ; John xv. 4, 9, 10.)

II. THE PARTICULAR BLESSINGS SOLICITED. I. 1. *That man's heart is a truant heart.* 2. *That the heart will not return to God of itself.* 3. *That the Lord can and will recover it.* II. 1. *The love of God.* 2. *The patient waiting for Christ.* The substance and matter are the same, but let any one write or speak on this arrangement of it, and he will discover its feebleness as contrasted with that given above.

Illustrative of the method in which passing events may be judiciously used to enforce or illustrate important truths, I find in the same old notes the following :—

A terrible shipwreck had just occurred,—an English convict ship had been stranded on the coast of France, and all hands perished, though all might have been saved. Before the tide went down French luggers came off and proposed to land the crew, and the soldiers, and the prisoners, but the Captain refused; the tide receded, and left the ship high and dry; but the Captain would not allow the crew or passengers to walk ashore, being obstinately persuaded that with the returning tide he could work off. But the sea returned in its strength, and the storm in its fury, and every effort was vain,—all the souls perished! Thus we are stranded on the shores of sin and the world,—offers of deliverance are repeatedly made us,—we slight them again and again. Once more we may escape,—the sand is dry,—we may walk ashore! No, we will not! At length God's wrath returns as a terrible storm and tide, and we perish all! And who is to blame? What a motive to urge men to repent and be saved while they may, lest they perish everlastingly!

It is a disposition and habit of soul. The enmity to God is slain—the heart is drawn out in love to Him—traces his love in everything.

Sees it in creation—"the works of his fingers."

Traces it in Providence—publicly, nationally, privately—in the history of his own life—its sorrows and joys.

Chiefly in salvation: the love of God in Christ Jesus, tasted, enjoyed, experienced. "Consolation in Christ Jesus and comfort of love."—He "continues in that love."—He "walks in love"—"is rooted and grounded in love."

He sees nothing but amazing love in God—and he buries his aching head in that deep bosom, and has "perfect peace."

2. Another harbour of refuge is "the patient waiting for Christ." Into this also, as into a hiding-place of the soul, the apostle prays that we may be directed.

(a) *The Church has always been waiting for her Lord.*

Under the former dispensation, for his first coming.

Under the present, for his second coming, "to wait for his Son from heaven." (1 Thess. i. 10.)

(b) *It is a state of expectation*—watching, waiting, looking for, desiring, hasting his advent. "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." (Rev. xxii. 20.) "Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" "O Lord, how long?" "Desiring to depart and be with Christ." (Philippians i. 23.)

(c) *It is a PATIENT WAITING for Christ*: not restless, discontented—not a wish to die and get out of trouble—but "the anxious looking for" is tempered by patient resignation—content to live, content to die—to abide the Lord's time. This is "the patience of Christ." (See margin.) "The patience of the saints." (Lamentations iii. 26.) "It is good quietly to wait for the salvation of the Lord." So (Jude 20, 21.)

Most blessed state of mind! Dwelling in the love of God, and quietly waiting for the coming of Christ, sheltered from all storms. "I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand." (Isaiah li. 16.) "His soul shall dwell at ease." "I wait for the Lord," &c. (Ps. cxxx. 5, 6.)

II.—INTO THIS BLESSED PLACE THE APOSTLE PRAYS THAT OUR HEARTS MAY BE DIRECTED: "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

1. It is here implied that man's heart is a truant heart, a heart gone away from God and his love.

This is the universal sin of man's heart—he does not love God—he loves the world, or earthly things—men differ in other things, but all men, good and bad, moral and wicked, are alike in this,—their hearts, affections, attachments, are not centred in God!

2. That they cannot, of themselves, return and love God.

If they could, why pray to God to direct them? Alas, like silly sheep, never can nor will return! "The way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." (Jer. x. 23.) "He cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength," &c. (Art. X.) No man hath quickened his own soul!

3. Neither can any earthly power direct him.

See what efforts are used, totally in vain. The prayers, instructions, tears, and labours of parents, cannot make their children love God! Ministers reason, exhort, entreat, warn, threaten, labour, pray, and all in vain; men's hearts will not be guided into God's love! All the means of grace expended, God's mercies and judgments exhausted, and men will not love God. "Who hath believed our report?" (Isa. liii. 1.)

4. But God can and will direct man's wandering heart into his love.

This is the special work of the Lord the Spirit. "He inclines our hearts unto God." (1 Kings viii. 58.) "He puts his law into our hearts." (Jer. xxxi. 33.) "It is the Spirit that quickeneth." Not by compelling us to act and to love contrary to our will, but giving us power "to will and to do according to his good pleasure."

Some are drawn into this love gently, calmly, gradually, by the sweet influence of the Spirit. (Hosea xi. 4.) "With cords of a man, with bands of love."

Others by storm and tempest, by affliction, sorrow, poverty, care, drawn out of the world into God's love.

Some by the Spirit's power on the means of Grace—by the power of God, the word of God, the preaching of the Gospel, the Holy Communion; the Holy Ghost moves on the face of the Church, to revive, awaken, guide, direct men's minds into God's love. "Draw me, we will run after thee." (Cant. i. 4.) "Incline my heart to thy testimonies." (Psalm cxix. 36.)

But whatever may be the means or instrument, whether it be men or angels, or the inanimate world, it is God's Holy Spirit alone which gives the power or inclination to seek God's love, and the same alone

can discover it more and more to the believer's soul,—“He takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us.” He leads us into God's love, and into this patient waiting for Christ, and there *keeps* us even to the end. (Romans v. 5.)

Brethren, never rest satisfied until you have found your way into this hiding-place.

God's promised grace does not supersede your active search for Him. In some cases “he is found of them who sought him not,” but all “who seek him shall find him.” “Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace.”

LXII.

IMPUTED SIN AND IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS.

2 Corinthians v. 21. “*For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*”

IF, like Job, “we abhor ourselves,” &c., then we shall welcome this great subject, which solves the question, how shall the sinner be just with God? Because no one else could do it, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself:” and how could this be done? How sin atoned for, how righteousness brought in? “He made him to be sin for us,” &c. (Text.)

I. GOD IMPUTES OUR SIN TO CHRIST.

II. HE IMPUTES CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS TO US.

I. 1. For whom was this great work undertaken?

“For us!” In what character? As righteous? Nay,—as sinners. In due time “Christ died for the ungodly.” (Rom. v. 6—8.) No good, past, present, or prospective, in us—for ruined and undone sinners.

2. Who commenced this great work of mercy?

God the Father! “God made Him to be sin for us.” “God

sent forth his Son." "God so loved the world," &c. Not by *compulsion*, for Christ "gave himself for us,"—came of his own accord,—*"Here am I, send me,"*—"offered himself without spot," &c. (Heb. ix. 14.) "The Father himself loved us." (Gal. iv. 4; 1 John iv. 9, 10.)

3. The sinlessness of the victim.

"He knew no sin." In one sense He had a perfect knowledge of sin, for He knew what was in man; but He had no personal, guilty, corrupted knowledge of sin. "In Him was no sin." (1 John iii. 5.) He needed no atonement. (Heb. vii. 26—28.) He was holy as God himself, and as incapable of sinning as God! "He was tempted in all points as we are, except sin." He had not the corrupt desire, impulses, &c. (Heb. iv. 15.)

4. This "holy thing" was "made sin for us!"

This is the great mystery of godliness, and in it lies the offence of the cross. May we meekly receive the revelation.

—*Christ did not make himself sin*,—as the devils did when they fell, or as Adam did when he sinned. "He did no sin," yet was made sin for us. How? Who can tell?

—*By imputation* our sins were reckoned as his,—God "caused to meet in Him the iniquity of us all." (Compare Isaiah liii. 6 with 1 Peter ii. 24.) As on "the scape-goat." He was a sin-offering, a sin-bearer, clothed in our guilt. He was dealt with as a sinner, and paid the penalty due.

—*This was by substitution.* "He was made a curse for us,"—our curse was put on Him standing in our place. As Abraham's ram, "offered in the stead of his son," He was substituted for him. (Galatians iii. 13; Romans viii. 3.) "Condemned sin in the flesh." Take away substitution, and you destroy the whole scheme of salvation.

II. GOD IMPUTES HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS TO US: "We are made the righteousness of God in him."

1. What meaneth this phrase—"The righteousness of God in Christ"?

Not the incommunicable holiness of Deity, though that was fully in Christ; but that could not be either imputed or imparted to us: but that special justifying righteousness, which Christ wrought out as man, us our federal head—the perfection of the GOD-MAN CHRIST JESUS—and therefore is called truly "the righteousness of God," "or God's righteousness"—a perfect, spotless, sinless work, accomplished by A MAN for men.

2. This righteousness, however divine, is ours :

—It is imputed to us, made over to us in the covenant of grace. “Of him are ye in Christ Jesus . . . who is made unto us righteousness,” &c. (1 Cor. i. 30.) Therefore He is “the Lord our righteousness,” (Jer. xxiii. 6.) Compare Romans iii. 21—26, and iv. 3—9, and x. 3, 4. Also (Philip. iii. 9) “found in Him, not having mine own righteousness,” &c.

—*A great, fundamental, saving truth* : study it well, consider Him—see all his spotless holiness, his perfect life—sinless obedience to all the Commandments—as a child, youth, man—in all branches of a perfect life—holy. God saw man once again “very good”—but whatever it was, it is ours—reckoned to us as if we did it—all He did, we did, as Israel paid tithes to Melchisedec in the loins of Abraham—so all justified sinners kept the law in Christ : in Him the believer is not only pardoned, or acquitted, or honourably dismissed—he is *justified* !

3. Now see the perfect antithesis of the text :—“He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

He was perfect holiness, and was made sin for us, and we were perfect sin, and made perfect righteousness in Him : in whatever way our sin is put on Him, so his righteousness is put on us. He stood in our place—we stand in his : however guilty we appeared, so He appeared when clothed in our sin : whatever wrath was due to us, was poured out on Him : whatever merit was in Him, is reckoned to us : as God saw Him in our sins, as “*a curse*,” so He sees us in Him as blessed, and delights in us as in Him : He punished Him for our sins, and rewards us for his goodness : his travail is ours, and his glory shall be ours too !

—*The pride of philosophy, and the obstinacy of unsanctified reason rejects these truths—but to reject them is unbelief and ruin* ! If your sins are not put on Christ, and his righteousness on you, you perish !

—*By faith only can such unpalatable doctrines be received—that faith which is the gift of God.* “All men have not faith.” And there “is a faith which stands in the wisdom of men”—and there is “a faith of God’s elect”—*this alone can save us* !

—*Oh! pray for faith*—a living, saving, realizing faith—which receives Christ fully—"which worketh by love," and "purifieth the heart," and which "saves us!"

LXIII.

"PRISONERS OF HOPE."

Zechariah ix. 12. "*Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope.*"

A GRACIOUS invitation to the captives of Zion, to be in Babylon for seventy years: "hope" is held out to them, even when judgment is denounced.

A much more gracious invitation, of wider import, and more comprehensive, is here! The whole context shows that Christ and his Gospel are here the theme of this truly "Evangelical Prophet." (Ver. 9—12.) The good Lord grant us ears to hear this loving voice of mercy!

I. THE PERSONS ADDRESSED—"the prisoners of hope."

II. THE ADDRESS ITSELF—"Turn you to the stronghold."

I. THE PERSONS ADDRESSED ARE "PRISONERS," "BUT PRISONERS OF HOPE."

1. Therefore not to all prisoners!

Not to devils or evil spirits—they are prisoners: we read of their "*chains*," &c. (2 Peter ii. 4.) But no "hope" for them—they are "where hope never comes." Nor to the spirits of wicked men now in the separate state of misery. "Spirits in prison." (1 Peter iii. 19.) "Dives," separated by a "great gulph." (Luke xvi. 26.) Only to men in the flesh.

2. The message is addressed to all unconverted men.

(a) *They are prisoners*: boast their liberty, freedom, &c., but are emphatically slaves—of sin, of their lusts, of the world, of Satan! "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." (John viii. 34.) "Bondage." (2 Peter ii. 19.) "Captives of the devil." (2 Tim.

ii. 25, 26.) The devil is their god and prince, whom they serve and obey. (Ephes. ii. 2, 3.)

- (b) *In their present state they are "without hope and without God in the world;" but they are "prisoners of hope:"*—there is hope for them! None living so vile, lost, wretched, undone, but there is hope for them—some link in the chain of mercy reaches them. "If from thence ye shall seek the Lord, ye shall find him." (Deut. iv. 29.) Chains strong—devil strong and "armed"—but One stronger than he can wrest the captive prey from him.

3. Penitent believers are "prisoners of hope:"

—How is this? Are not the Lord's people free? Has not Christ liberated them? "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John viii. 36.) And in many respects they are so—and if they lived up to their privileges they might be altogether so: but theirs is a case of progress.

- (a) *See the newly-awakened sinner*—he begins to feel his chains—hear him bewail himself. "Innumerable evils compass me about," &c. (Psalm xl. 12.) Guilt weighs down his soul—sin dwells in him, he loathes himself—he seems unable to escape, "Tied and bound with the chain of his sins."

—*But he is a prisoner of hope!* Already gleams of light and joy penetrate his heart—he does not despair—he is looking to Jesus—soon the fulness of that salvation shall be discovered to him by the Holy Spirit, and he shall be free!

- (b) *See the downcast believer in conflict*—"Sore let and hindered in running the race set before him." "The good that he would he cannot do," &c. "Oh wretched man that I am," &c. "He groans, being burthened." (Romans viii. 23; 2 Cor. v. 2, 4; Romans vii. 15—24.)

—*But he is a prisoner of hope:*—while in struggle and in conflict, and crying out for pain, he can say, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. vii. 25.) "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor. xv. 57.) "Who always causeth us to triumph in Christ." (2 Cor. ii. 14.)

- (c) *Even on confines of glory, believer is still only a prisoner of hope!*—Flesh holds him, and death awaits him—he is tied to earth as a bird by a string, or a balloon by its ropes—corruption preys upon him: but he has "a hope laid up for him in heaven." (Col. i. 5.) "He holds fast the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end." (Heb. iii. 6.) "The full assurance of hope" (vi. 11).

To all these is the address made.

II. THE ADDRESS ITSELF: "Turn you to the stronghold."

1. None can doubt where this stronghold is—it is in Christ.

"*Our King*"—"salvation"—"*blood of the covenant.*" (See verses 9, 10, 11.) "The Lord their God will save them." (Ver. 16.) "We have salvation for walls and bulwarks." (Isaiah xxvi. 1.) "Munitions of rocks." (Isaiah xxxiii. 16.) "My rock." (Psalm xviii. 1.) "He comes to preach deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," &c. (Isaiah lxi. 1.) —In Him if hid, safe, from sin, Satan, world, death, hell, and every calamity. Sweet and safe repose for timid soul—"Your life is hid with Christ in God." (Col. iii. 3.)

2. Here is our mission, to invite all the prisoners of hope to flee to this stronghold.

(a) *Ye servants, slaves of sin*, the world, appetite, passion, corruption, for years, &c.!

—"TURN"—turn away from your old masters and tyrants—turn to God in Christ; seek, labour, strive for mercy and grace in Him! "Flee for your lives, look not behind you!" The day of wrath is at hand!

(b) *Ye conscious prisoners*—who bemoan the guilt and the power of your sins, who sink beneath their burden, who can neither atone for the past, nor face the future—without strength, hope, salvation, peace!

—*Oh turn to the stronghold.* Here is One "able to save." Here is atonement—here is pardon, peace, grace, salvation—all you need—for you—even for you.

(c) *Ye fettered, burthened servants of God*—who go heavily, full of doubts, fears, discomforts—often defeated, cast down.

—*Turn away from yourselves*, from your own doings, good or bad. Turn from all hopeless efforts to mend yourselves, to conquer yourselves—and "*Turn to the stronghold*"—"look to Jesus"—believe in Jesus—see in Him all you need—"draw out of his fulness"—dwell in Him, "abide in Him," cleave to Him by faith—look at yourself in Him, as God does, and be not faithless, but believing.

(d) *Ye who have tasted the sweets of spiritual liberty*—"Stand fast, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage." (Galatians v. 1.) Remember ye are still in the body—therefore walk circumspectly, humbly, softly, with your God. Trust Him wholly, fully—believe that He will finish the good work in you—so shall you have peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, and be edified.

LXIV.

THE LAW CONVINCES OF SIN.

Romans vii. 13. *"That sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful."*

ERRONEOUS and superficial views of the nature and guilt of sin are prevalent. . . . There can be no true Evangelical repentance where this is so. . . . It is the primary object of Revelation—of the Law, of the Commandment, to make this appear—to prove what sin is, and what it does.

This is the grand object of the apostle in the text and context :—may that object be accomplished in us by the teaching of the Holy Spirit !

I. CONSIDER THE NATURE OF THE LAW : God's revealed will. (Ver. 12.)

1. It is a perfect discovery of our duty :

—a traditionary law existed before the Sinai Law was given—every law in the two tables was known from the beginning—Sabbath-breaking, murder, adultery, and theft, were known as sins before—but then ratified, embodied, authorized—by the voice from heaven—thunder, trumpet, &c. An eternal law, suited to all ages.

2. Its spirituality and extent :

—reaches to the heart, and requires truth in the inward parts—obedience from right motives—not outward conformity only. Therefore God promised to write it on their hearts. (Jer. xxxi. 33.)

3. Its inflexibility :

—unbending, uncompromising. A great error to teach that under the Gospel the moral law accommodates itself to man's frailty, and accepts sincere in the place of perfect obedience ! This is false doctrine—God's law unchangeable—in Paradise—before the flood—till Christ came, and since. "Do this and live—transgress and die." The law a rule of life to the pardoned and accepted believer, but he can never be accepted, or justified by his obedience to it : on the contrary.

II. THIS LAW, RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD, BRINGS ALL MEN IN GUILTY BEFORE GOD. Its great object, since the fall, is the condemnation of all men.

—*This is the purport of the apostle's argument.*

In chapter i. convicts the Gentile world, and in chapter ii. the Jewish—in chap. iii. both Jews and Gentiles—"no difference"—"all under sin." (Ver. 9, and 19, 20.) "For by the law is the knowledge of sin." And so in his Epistle to the Galatians iii. 21—24, &c. "The Scripture hath concluded all under sin," &c.

—*If any doubt this truth, let him take the summary of the law given by Christ—"The two great Commandments."* Towards God—and towards man—let him test his heart by each and say which of them he has not broken !

III. THIS LAW, WHEN APPLIED TO THE HEART BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, MAKES SIN EXCEEDING SINFUL.

—[Here review and paraphrase the context.]

—*See Paul before this process had taken place in his heart.* "Without the law, sin was dead" (ver. 8)—he thought himself good and righteous : "I was alive without the law once" (ver. 9)—quite happy in conscious innocence.

—*See Paul afterwards :* "The commandment came" (ver. 9—11)—came home to my heart and conscience—"and sin revived, and I died !" Sin's strength, guilt, power appeared, and I was slain, dead, helpless, lost.

—*The fault was not in the law—"that was holy, just, good"—"but sin, that it might appear sin, worked death"—"that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful."* Thus he learned "the exceeding sinfulness of sin."

—*Such a process alone can work in us genuine repentance and hatred of sin :* such as Job felt (xl. 4 and xlii. 5, 6), and David (Psalm li.), or Peter, when "he wept bitterly." Henceforward *sin is a burthen—odious in its nature—dreadful in its effects, destroying the soul—slew the Saviour—and its residue in the heart disturbs, distracts, and wounds.*

Brethren, seek by a spiritual understanding of the nature and extent of God's law to know and experience the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

—*Never rest until you have obtained the pardon of sin, and peace of conscience through Christ ; a renewal of the heart by the Holy Spirit.*

LXV.

THE CARNAL AND SPIRITUAL MIND.

Romans viii. 6. "*For to be carnally minded is death ; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*"

ST. PAUL delights in strong antitheses—as here and in verse 5—"If ye live after the flesh ye shall die, but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live : " sometimes in paradoxes, as " When I am weak, then am I strong "—"as having nothing, yet possessing all things."

A style calculated to awaken, arouse, impress : to induce reflection and self-examination. May the striking antithesis of the text lead us to careful investigation of our state before God !

I. THE CHARACTER AND DOOM OF THE UNCONVERTED : "To be carnally minded is death."

1. What it is to be "carnally minded :

—It is not a description of *some* very wicked people, but of the wicked principle in *everybody* ! The seat of the evil is not in the body, but in the mind—not as some speak, "The nobler part of man governing his baser appetites"—it is the mind itself that is carnal—debased, alienated from God. The body for the most part is but the agent, "the instrument" of the mind's unrighteousness. We read of the "filthiness of the Spirit" as well as "the filthiness of the flesh."

—*Some of the symptoms and actings of this state of mind are given in the context :* "They that are after the flesh" (ver. 8), that is, "carnally minded," "do mind the things of the flesh." "To mind them," means to be intent upon them, to regard them as of first importance, to be engrossed in them. Honour, distinction, wealth, luxury, fame, and such like. And to "mind these" is placed by the apostle among debasing vices—"whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, *who mind earthly things* !" (Philip. iii. 19.)

—*Again, it is to be in a state of enmity with God !* "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God." (Ver. 7.) Men do not hate

the God of their own inventions, an ideal God, one who is all love, who winks at sin, and will not punish the guilty, but they hate God as revealed in his Word. No love for Him, no taste for his Word, his Sabbath, his spiritual religion—nor for his salvation in Christ—it is “a stumbling-block.”

—*Yet more—this “carnal mind,”* or man in his natural unrenewed state, is rebellious, “For it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” (Ver. 7.) This is the very essence of it—“disobedience”—a moral indisposition, nay incapacity, to keep God’s Commandments, “it is not subject,” “*neither indeed can be!*” “So then they that are in the flesh”—in their natural carnal state, “CANNOT PLEASE GOD!”

2. And what is this but death?

(a) *Spiritual death, leading to eternal death* :—“To be carnally minded is death.” A figure constantly used to denote unconversion. “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.” “Dead in trespasses and sins.” “You hath he quickened who were dead.” Conversion is “a passing from death unto life.” Dead to God, dead to spiritual things, to eternal things—alive, active, energetic to the carnal life—but absolutely inaccessible to God’s Word.

(b) *And this spiritual death is the commencement of eternal death* ; whatever that “second death” may mean. The miserable destiny of the wicked is not so much a positive infliction of punishment as a moral consequence and necessity. Where can that man go, and what shall become of him, who leaves this world “dead in sins?”—“Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God,” and all who “mind earthly things,” dying so, are manifestly excluded by the nature of things from a holy, spiritual heaven! Where then, can they go? to what after-condition, to what eternal state are they adapted? The answer is but one—“The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God.” “For to be carnally minded is death!” temporal, moral, spiritual, eternal—the commencement in this world of a miserable condition to be *perfected* in the next. But see the contrast.

II. “TO BE SPIRITUALLY MINDED IS LIFE AND PEACE.”

1. “To be spiritually minded :”

What is this? It is opposed to the natural state, “carnally minded”—as much opposed as life and death! Neither can the spiritual mind co-exist with the carnal—a great change must take

place—a great gulph must be passed, before there can be spirituality. “That which is born of the flesh, is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit—marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again.” (John iii. 3, 5—7.) There must be a new heart, a new nature—“a new creation.” A man must be “born of the Spirit” before he can “live and walk in the Spirit.” (See ver. 1.) “The law of the spirit of life,” or of “the spiritual life” in Christ Jesus must make him “free from the law of sin and death.” (Ver. 2.) There is life in Christ—spiritual life—a law—or great principle of life—active and strong—and this must energise the dead sinner, that he may become spiritual. No man can be spiritual except by the Holy Ghost dwelling in him. “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.” (Ver. 9.)

—*The actings of the spiritual mind are about spiritual things*: as the carnal mind minds the things of the flesh, so the spiritual mind minds the things of the Spirit—“the things of God”—“The things of Jesus Christ”—that is spiritual, heavenly, eternal things. The interests of the soul, of his own soul, and of the souls of others. The opposite state described—“All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” The spiritually minded is intent on “those things which make for his peace”—to secure his own salvation, and promote that of others, is his chief concern. He is spiritual—“his conversation is in heaven”—his heart is there, he walks with God, knows Him, loves Him, delights in holy exercise—prayer, praise, communion, meditation, God’s Word, Sabbaths, sacraments—all his delight and chief joy.

2. Thus to be spiritually minded is “LIFE” and “PEACE.”

(a) *It is LIFE!* in every sense—he only lives, who lives to God—the world’s votaries have life—a gay life, a life of activity, of vanity, of pleasure, of successful business—but this is not life, moral, spiritual, heavenly—it is *death!*—a living death, terminable by eternal death! But the spiritual life is life indeed! It is not animal life, nor intellectual life, but soul life—a life derived from God himself. “I am come that they might have life,” said the Saviour. It is the Divine life in the soul—“partakers of the nature of God”—“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

—*This spiritual life is the actual commencement of eternal life.* When a man is born again, or born of the Spirit, he begins to live for ever—“he hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.” (John v. 24.) “He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live :

and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die !” (John xi. 25, 26.) There is a moral necessity here as in the former case. Spiritual death is the preparation for eternal death, which is only its consummation—spiritual life is the commencement here, of the full development of it hereafter—“ *This is life eternal*, to know thee the true God and Jesus Christ,” &c. (John xvii. 3.) This is all we know or can understand of heaven—the perfection, completion, development of that spiritual life which is now living and growing in our hearts—which is the pledge, the earnest, the foretaste, and so the assurance of heavenly glory.

- (b) *Lastly, to be spiritually minded is PEACE !* A special boon, neither known nor promised, nor desired by the world ! The believer’s sweetest comfort ! “Peace,” peace of conscience, arising from sin forgiven—peace of mind, from faith in the truth and love, and wisdom of Jehovah ! Repose, tranquillity, unutterable rest in the bosom of God, reconciled in Christ. Peace in the storm. (Isaiah xxxii. 15, 17—19 ; xxvi. 3, 4.) “Great peace have they who love God’s law, and nothing shall offend them.” “The peace of God which passeth all understanding,” &c.

—*Behold the way of life and the way of death !* “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die ! If after the Spirit, ye shall live !” Examine selves, prove selves ! Do you mind, love, follow, choose, and labour for the things of the flesh, of the world, of time ? then are you carnally minded, and death is your state and portion—now and eternally !

—But if ye seek God, salvation, Christ, heaven, and all the things connected with them—then you *have life !* Oh keep it, cherish it, strengthen it—it is and shall be to you Eternal life ! Begun now, completed in glory !

LXVI.

THE SHORTNESS OF TIME.

1 Corinthians vii. 29—31. *“But this, I say, brethren, the time is short : it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none ; and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world, as not abusing it ; for the fashion of this world passeth away.” **

MANY injunctions in this chapter are difficult to be understood, peculiar to those times, and the circumstances of a persecuted Church,—some refer to obsolete customs, lost in obscurity ; but in the text the Apostle breaks forth into a noble and animated address, suited to all believers in all ages ! May the Holy Spirit apply his touching appeal to all our hearts ! Consider—

I. THE FAMILIAR AND AFFECTING TRUISMS ON WHICH THE APOSTLE BASES HIS EXHORTATION.

II. THE EXHORTATION ITSELF.

* I had two other sketches on this text,—for example sake they may be noticed. In each of them I inverted the order,—I. THE DUTY INCULCATED ; and II. THE CONSIDERATIONS BY WHICH IT IS ENFORCED. The fault of that arrangement is, that we want to repeat under the second head that which we have exhausted under the first. The duty, or the exhortation, more naturally rises out of the affecting thoughts of time's brevity. These two sketches also differed in the management of the subdivisions suggested by the text itself. It is often very difficult to determine, in such cases (and they often occur), how the successive steps shall be taken.

In the earlier sermon on this subject, under the first head,—*The duty*,—1. I showed what it was not,—it was not the life of a cynic. (a) Marriage was lawful. (b) To weep was lawful. (c) To rejoice was lawful. (d) To buy and sell was lawful. (e) To use the world was lawful. But 2. (a) Those who were married as though they were not. (b) Weep, as though wept not. (c) Rejoice, as though not. (d) Buy, as though possessed not. (e) Who use the world as not abusing it.

This was a failure, because it does not do, in such a string of antitheses, to separate each from each. The limit and the restraint of each should immediately succeed the licence,—marriage is lawful, but—We may weep, but—This rule is observed in the above sketch, which is more satisfactory than those referred to in this note.

I. 1. "The time is short!"

2. "The fashion of this world passeth away!"

1. "The time is short!"

(a) *TIME seems long to mortals.* We look back to remote antiquity—to the earth before Adam, it may be millions of years—to the ancient landmarks—Methuselah, Noah, Abraham, and the long stream of history—hundreds and thousands of years—they seem long! But it is short! All time! What are 6,000 years to eternity? "Our fathers, where are they?" &c.

(b) But *THE TIME*,—some specific time is short,—that which "*remaineth*" (ver. 29),—our time,—our day of probation,—our day of grace,—the little time of life,—*your* time, and *my* time,—our share of it,—what is it? Is it not *short*?

—*To many thousands what a little span of life is allowed*,—babes, children, infants, youths, are born and die!

—*The longest life, what is it?* Ask Jacob. (Genesis xlvii. 8, 9.)

"Few and evil," &c. The "threescore years and ten, or even four score," what is it? "Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live." (Job xiv. 1, 2.) "Swifter than the weaver's shuttle." (Chap. vii. 6.) "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as flower of grass," &c. (Isaiah xl. 6—8.)

(c) *These commonplaces have little influence until we are touched ourselves*—then we feel them. When sickness, sorrow, pain visit our homes,—when our loved ones droop, and fade, and leave us,—then we know the power of such truths.

2. "The fashion of this world passeth away!"

—"*Its fashion*," form, beauty, loveliness—its customs, pleasures, excitements, joys, occupations—"all that is in the world"—its brightest, its gayest, its best.

—"*Passeth away*,"—is passing away, moving on, never stops—on, and on, and on,—as we grasp it, it is gone,—as we speak it flies,—like a procession—there it comes—here it is—there it goes! As soon as born "we are going towards the grave," and never rest until the earth closes upon us!

II. THE EXHORTATION WHICH THE APOSTLE BASES ON THESE TRUTHS. Seeing that the time is so short, and that all below is passing away, "it remaineth," or we conclude, as some read it, and draw these inferences.

1. "Let those who have wives be as though they had none."

(a) *It is lawful for Christian men to have wives.* "Marriage is honourable in all men," &c. (Heb. xiii. 4.) Celibacy is the exception—marriage the rule,—“instituted in the state of man's innocency,”—sanctioned by Christ's presence and first miracle,—consecrated as the type of Christ's union with his Church (Ephes. v. 23, &c.),—holy fountain of all that is pure in our social relations.

(b) *But let them "that have wives be as though they had none,"* because time is so short—world passing away,—let them hold their blessings as with an uncertain tenure,—wives and husbands are soon separated,—the union is sweet, but too often short, interrupted, rudely crushed,—let them "rejoice with trembling," all will soon be over !

2. "And they that weep as though they wept not."

(a) *It is lawful to weep :* the indulgence of sorrow is not sinful, even touching the things of this life.—“Jesus wept,”—and the mourning sisters wept, and Jesus rebuked them not, (John xi.) We may weep for ourselves, and for others,—“rivers of tears,” &c,—“tears have been my meat day and night.” (Psalm xlii. 3.)

(b) *But not immoderately,—“as though you wept not.”* Why should we weep over shadows ? It will soon be over,—“sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” Our weeping time is short, and the fashion of sorrow passeth away ! Even now there is One who can give us “oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” (Isaiah lxi. 3.)

3. "And they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not."

(a) *It is lawful to rejoice,* even in the pleasant things of this world. "The bridegroom and the bride," "the harvest home," the happy domestic circle, the gaiety of youth. This world is not all sorrow and tears,—there is a time to laugh as well as to weep,—love's bright eye is not dimmed, nor friendship's warm hand chilled by godliness. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth," is not ironical nor a mockery. (Ecclesiastes xi. 9.)

(b) *But let joy be chastened, restrained,—“let him that rejoiceth be as though he rejoiced not,”—“for the time is short,—this fashion passeth away.”* Let the young man, in the exuberance of youth, recollect the judgment-day,—in our sweetest delights let us remember that this is not our home, nor our rest,—this is not our treasure, our all, &c.

4. "And those that buy as though they possessed not."

(a) *It is lawful to buy, and sell, and get gain.* Business, commerce,

manufacture, husbandry, in all their branches (if not injurious to their fellow-creatures, as trades in vice, or the sale of spirituous liquors)—all are lawful. Merchandise may be “holiness to the Lord,” and the Christian virtues shine in the shop and on the exchange.

- (b) *But beware of covetousness and worldliness*,—“let those that buy, be as though they possessed not.” “When riches increase set not your heart upon them.” (Psalm lxii. 10.) Hold your property “as though you held it not,” so frail is its tenure! It passeth away, it has wings, and flies swiftly. Money is often laid up in “a bag with holes.” (Haggai i. 6.) This too “passeth away!”

5. Comprehensively; “use this world as not abusing it.”

- (a) *“Use this world:”* Christians are not cynics, nor monks, nor hermits, nor nuns, nor cloistered devotees. They are not to go “out of the world” (1 Cor. v. 10); they are to be in it, to mingle with its busy crowds, engage in all its lawful occupations, enjoy its innocent, and moral, and virtuous pleasures.
- (b) *But not to “abuse it;”* to their soul’s injury—not “to love it”—but “to be crucified to it”—“to keep themselves unspotted from it” (James i. 27)—“to shine as lights in the world”—“to overcome it”—“because the time is short, and the fashion of the world passeth away,”—shall we idolize it, embrace the shadow, lose the substance?

—But how often have such motives been urged in vain! All men know, and at times feel their truth, but if shaken out of their folly for a while, they return again to their idols. No moral essay on the vanity of life will wean men’s hearts from the world! There must be a new heart—a new principle.

—*Note that the exhortation of the Apostle is addressed to believers—to “the brethren;”* he is discussing altogether the duties of “the saints,” “the faithful brethren in Christ.” We cannot “overcome the world” until we have “believed in Jesus,”—“this is the victory, even our faith,” “and whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.” (1 John v. 1, 4.) It is vain to say to you, “Love not the world,” &c., until you have learned to love God. “Ye must be born again,” then new joys, new hopes, fresher and brighter things will burst upon your view. Cry to God “for a new heart and a right spirit!”

LXVII.

REJECTED AND ACCEPTED WORSHIP.

Proverbs xv. 8. "*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord : but the prayer of the upright is his delight.*"

FROM the days of Cain and Abel, even until now, there have always been two classes of worshippers,—one of them acceptable to God, the other rejected of Him ; in the strong language of the text, one of them an actual "abomination" to Him, the other "a delight !" How important then to distinguish them,—how urgent for us to ascertain to which we belong ! May God search our hearts, and save us from self-deception !

I. THE SACRIFICE OF THE WICKED.

II. THE PRAYER OF THE UPRIGHT.

I. Strange that the wicked should pray, and stranger too, that if they pray they should not be heard ! Is the door of mercy shut against any one ? Will not God listen ?

1. Who are the wicked ?

This is a generic term, including all vicious, profligate, profane, licentious, unjust, unholy, irreligious persons,—all who do not in heart love God, and who do not keep his commandments. Observe, it is of such, continuing such, in their sins, in the love and practice of them, that the wise man speaks,—not the penitent wicked, nor any who turn from their wickedness.

2. Their sacrifice :

—Strange that such persons should offer sacrifice at all ; but they have always done so,—there are in every congregation some wicked—that is, unconverted worshippers—who pray with their lips only, and not in their hearts.

—*Private prayer* is often maintained by persons not really religious ; persons in a state of intoxication have been known to say their prayers before lying down ! Formality, superstition, fear, custom induce the practice.

—*Public worship frequented by such.* Many who live in sin, and

love sin, attend church on a Sunday, and appear devoutly to say their prayers. With some this is a sort of compromise for the dissipation or folly of the week, or it is respectable, or fashionable, or a cloke for secret, dishonest, or unholy practices. Political motives bring some to church. But whatever the case may be, such worshippers are to be found everywhere.

3. Their sacrifice is "an abomination to the Lord."

This is universally testified. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law,"—that is, is disobedient,—“even his prayer shall be abomination.” (Chap. xxviii. 9.) (See Isaiah i. 11—14.) “When ye make many prayers, I will not hear.” (lviii. 1, 2; Ezekiel xiv. 3; and xxxiii. 31, 32.) “I hate, I despise your feast days.” (Amos v. 21—25.) And David says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me.” (Psalm lxvi. 18.) Sin loved and continued in renders worship hypocritical and hateful to God.

II. “THE PRAYER OF THE UPRIGHT.”

1. “The upright” are those who are faithful, true, sincere, consistent, uniform in their love to God, and in their obedience to his commands.

“Thou, most upright God, dost weigh the paths of the just.” (Isaiah xxvi. 7.) Many similar definitions: It is “the honest and good heart,”—it is “the pure in heart,”—those who “wash their hands in innocency,”—the “perfect,”—that is, the “thoroughly purposed.” “Thou hast proved mine heart,” &c. (Psalm xvii. 3.)

2. Their prayer.

Nothing said of it,—sure “that it goeth not out of feigned lips.” (Psalm xvii. 1.) It may be long or short—fervent or cold—extempore or written—public or private,—it may be only broken sighs, tears, “groans which cannot be uttered;” but it is “PRAYER”—heart-prayer, sincere, earnest,—the utterance of need, necessity, sorrow, confession, adoration, praise,—it is just “the prayer of the upright.”

3. SUCH “PRAYER IS THE LORD’S DELIGHT:”

—It is a small thing to say that He hears, will answer, will bless; —“*He delights in it!*” Wonderful, that the great God should be delighted with the feeble cries of his people! As a mother listens to the broken accents of her little child. “The Lord’s delight is in his people,” his “inheritance,” “his jewels,” “his dear child.” (Jeremiah xxxi. 18—20.) When they pray “He smells a sweet savour.” (Genesis viii. 21, with Ephes. v. 2.)

—*What consolation for tried and tempted believers*—often they pray, and think the Lord will not hear, that He has left them, deserted them, shut up, shut out—“Why hast thou forsaken me?” while then it is that God is pondering their struggles, helping them in conflict, and actually delighting himself in their prayers and tears!

—What a test of character and worship have we here! Every person present in this congregation has been offering worship to God, which is either “an ABOMINATION” or “a DELIGHT” to the ALMIGHTY—if the former we are cursed like CAIN, if the latter blessed like ABEL! Which is yours, and yours, and yours?

—Every one who is honest with God and with himself may know if he will! If sin is still loved, practised, indulged even in the heart—“then your prayer is turned into sin!” Religious observances do but increase the condemnation of such. “Let the wicked forsake his way, &c., and turn unto the Lord,” &c.—“Wash you, make you clean,” &c.,—then accepted. (See Isaiah i. 16—20.)

—Coming to God in his appointed way, by Christ Jesus—honestly, sincerely, heartily—however feebly and unworthily,—there are no bounds to his blessing—“He delights” in you—can He do more? And what will not the Lord do for those in whose supplications He delights?

LXVIII.

JOSEPH'S CHASTITY.

Genesis xxxix. 9. “*How, then, can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?*”

THE life of Joseph is one of the most interesting, dramatic, instructive—the delight of the young and the old, of the learned and unlearned. The particular instance recorded in the first Lesson for this morning's service,* though depicting a scene of wickedness, painful to a virtuous

* The third Sunday in Lent.

mind, is too full of wholesome instruction, and godly warning, to be passed over in silence. May a spirit of purity dwell among us while we consider the conduct of Joseph on this occasion.

I. WE MUST OFFER SOME GENERAL REMARKS ON THIS SIN.

II. CONSIDER JOSEPH'S SEVERE TEMPTATION.

III. THE VICTORY WHICH HE ACHIEVED.

I. 1. The class of sins suggested by the text are those which the world makes light of.

It is "gallantry"—"youthful indiscretion"—rather proof of a high spirit! The liar is branded with shame, the thief is despised, the murderer hung, amidst execrations—but the SEDUCER, who is a compound of them all, is received in society and often caressed and admired! How surely is "the friend of the world the enemy of God!" (James iv. 4.)

2. But all such sins are denounced in Holy Scripture as deadly sins.

• "Thou shalt not commit adultery." "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, &c., hath any inheritance in the kingdom of God." (Ephes. v. 3—7, 11, 12; Gal. vi. 7, 8.) "Flee youthful lusts," &c. (2 Tim. ii. 22.) "Whoremongers and adulterers, God will judge." (Hebrews xiii. 4.) "They shall have part in the lake of fire," &c. (Rev. xxi. 8.) "Lust conceived brought forth sin; and sin, when finished, death!" (James i. 15.)

3. God has marked them with his providential displeasure.

How many constitutions ruined and lives shortened by dissipation! Manifold diseases handed down to after-generations, the consequences of this sin! How much misery, how many broken hearts, ruined characters, blighted prospects, through this sin! In all ranks what misery and bitterness:—this is God's BRAND on this sin!

4. They are generally secret sins:

—"works of darkness"—lonely, hidden—but a day is coming when all will be brought to light—"God will judge the secrets of men." (Romans ii. 16.) "The hidden things of darkness" discovered! Oh! for that searching day!

II. BUT CONSIDER JOSEPH'S SEVERE TEMPTATION TO THIS SIN. He

had been tried by calamity, now by prosperity, honour, credit, &c. But consider

—*His circumstances*: a stranger, captive, youth; ruddy and fair—far away from restraint, none to warn, or encourage, or support him—he stood alone in a heathen land.

—*His tempter was his superior*: had he been elated, puffed up, conceited of his good fortune, he might have fallen through pride. His tempter might further his worldly interests—had great influence with her husband.

—*Everything promised concealment*: she could not betray him without injuring herself—"it will never be known," "never discovered"—what a snare is this!

—*There was importunity*—"day by day" this wretched woman was soliciting this youth to commit sin.

—*And opportunity*—often left in the house alone with her—no fear, no witness, no danger!

—Oh! how many have yielded to temptations not half so strong as these!

II. BUT CONSIDER THE VICTORY HE ACHIEVED.

1. We must notice that Joseph was habitually a virtuous man.

This implied in the whole story. Where there is a habit of indulgence there is little chance of any resistance against a particular temptation.

2. Joseph regarded this sin as it respected his master. (See ver. 8, 9.)

Joseph pleads that it would be a breach of trust and honour towards a kind and good man who placed confidence in him. Inferior motives lawful to strengthen virtue: this is a dreadful sin against man, against society, outrages propriety, creates scandal.

3. But he specially regarded it as "wickedness" and "a sin against God."

"How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God!" It was a crime before God! This filled David's mind, when, alas, he had fallen into this sin—"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Psalm li. 4)—although he had sinned frightfully against man! How can I—I who have had such mercy and love shown me—I for whom Christ died—how can I sin against such a God?

4. Observe—"he fled and gat him out."

—Flight under some circumstances is our only resource—"Flee from

evil"—“Flee fornication.” (1 Cor. vi. 18.) “But thou, O man of God, flee these things.” (1 Tim. vi. 11.) Flee from those places, people, circumstances, positions which have been snares to you.

5. This victory was not achieved without the Lord.

“The Lord was with Joseph,” &c., it is repeatedly said. With him in the pit, when a prisoner among the Ishmaelites, in the dungeon—and not less with him in this fiery trial. “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation.” (2 Peter ii. 9.) Without Him we can do nothing—but all things through Christ that strengtheneth us.

Are any here free from the assaults of this temptation? let them bless God—walk humbly, watchfully, prayerfully.

—*Are any here slaves to this sin?*—Oh! flee for your lives! It will destroy you with a sore destruction! It will consume you! Christ’s blood shall atone for the past—God’s grace help you in future! Despair not—nothing is too hard for Him! Wherefore repent, believe, and be saved.

LXIX.

A CLEAN THING OUT OF AN UNCLEAN.

Job xiv. 4. “*Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one!*”

THIS passage of Scripture is consecrated to many by the associations of affliction and sorrow! Job had pictured man’s misery! “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble; he cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down,” &c. (Ver. 1, 2.) Such is man’s vanity—and whence his vanity? his sorrow? death? It is from his sin and pollution! He is unholy, impure.—“And who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one!” May God teach us by his Holy Spirit to feel this, and to discover the remedy.

I. MAN’S STATE MISERABLE, GUILTY, AND UNHOLY.

II. MAN'S STATE HOPELESS.

III. MAN DELIVERED AND SAVED NOTWITHSTANDING.

I. MAN'S STATE MISERABLE, GUILTY, AND UNHOLY: in one word, he is "an unclean thing."

—*This is the universal testimony of experience*—whoever heard or read of a holy man, except he were made holy by godliness? Man is everywhere and always the same. Differs in many things—colour of skin, language, habits; civilized, barbarous, cultivated and savage—but all alike unholy! Vice is found everywhere—same passions, appetites, evil tempers, lusts—"no difference," Jew and Gentile, ancients and moderns—many inventions, but same lusts.

—*This the testimony of Scripture*—with the additional evidence, that we are born in this state. It is not true that man is born a little angel—all purity and love, and that his wickedness is the result of external influences. He is not inoculated with the vices of sin, it is born in him! "Born in sin and shapen in iniquity," &c.—"Imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." (Genesis vi. 5; viii. 21.) Grows with his growth. As all his powers, mental and bodily, are developed, so the evil principle in like manner. "Abominable and filthy." (Chap. xv. 14—16.) "All as an unclean thing." (Isaiah lxiv. 6.)

II. MAN'S STATE IS HOPELESS. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one!" It is impossible, contrary to nature.

—*This is the voice of all creation*,—a universal principle established from the beginning,—like produces like,—an unclean animal cannot beget a clean one,—the seed of a poisonous plant will not produce a wholesome one,—"the fountain" cannot produce salt and fresh water, "or both sweet and bitter." (James iii. 12.) "Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles," &c. "The good tree, good fruit,—the evil tree, evil fruit." (Matt. vii. 16—20.) So Adam "begat a son in his own likeness, after his image,"—that is, a fallen being, a sinner, and so ever since—sin handed down, &c.

—*Men have endeavoured to disturb the order of nature, and have failed.* As in nature—cross breeds, but cannot mingle races! No change—same animals, &c. So tried in morals—to heal and cleanse himself:—"taken much snow-water," but in vain! "The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots." (Jeremiah xiii. 23.) Corrupt nature has returned upon him. Man's case is in

itself hopeless,—“he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works,” &c. (Art. X.)

III. GOD HEALS AND SAVES MAN NOTWITHSTANDING. Even He does not “bring a clean thing out of an unclean,” but He puts a clean thing into an unclean, and so cleanses it.

—*God puts his Holy Spirit into the heart of man*, so that he is “born again”—“created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works”—“he is begotten again.” “That which is impossible with man, is possible with God.” (Matt. xix. 26.) A moral miracle is performed—the whole character is changed—the whole man—his body, soul, and spirit. Not that his evil nature is taken away—that lives and dies with him, but a new nature is imparted which subdues the old, “brings every thought into subjection to laws of Christ.”

—*Why then are not all baptized Christians thus cleansed?* As of old, “Is there no balm in Gilead? &c., why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?” (Jeremiah viii. 22.) Because they despise the balm, the remedy, the cleansing! Infatuated with the medicine of empirics, they forsake the true Physician? The result is inevitable,—they continue impure, polluted, sick, and they must die in their sins.

See the importance of this doctrine in your own case.

—A mistake here is fatal! Beware! if you think you can by any contrivance heal, cleanse, and purify yourself, you are lost! You must be humbled,—you must be made to feel your own vileness,—you must take up the “leper’s cry, with a covering on your upper lip—unclean, unclean!” (Leviticus xiii. 45.) You will never seek the “blood of sprinkling,” nor the Spirit of purifying, till you know by bitter experience your own vileness.

—*See the importance of this doctrine as it respects the education of your children.* If you think they are born good and holy, or even with natural propensities to good, your education of them will be delusive and vain. But if you recognise in them the fallen principle predominating, and in their infant hearts detect the seeds of every full-grown vice, then will you train them accordingly, applying that spiritual, moral, and scriptural influence, which alone can control and model the young heart, leading

them early to Jesus, nourishing them in his love, feeding them with "the sincere milk of his Word," and causing that "from a child each shall know the Holy Scriptures," &c. (2 Tim. iii. 15—17.) "So the Lord may direct their young hearts into his love."

LXX.

HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER.

2 Kings xix. 14. "*And Hezekiah received the letter at the hand of the messenger and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.*"

THE KING'S danger at this time was imminent—threatened by powerful foes, and, having small means of resistance, he flies to God for help and safety, and faith brings speedy deliverance. (Ver. 20.) Let us contemplate Hezekiah on this occasion—

I. EXERCISING THE BELIEVER'S PRIVILEGE.

II. DISCOVERING A TRAIT IN THE BELIEVER'S CHARACTER.

III. SETTING AN EDIFYING EXAMPLE OF BELIEVING PRAYER.

I. HE EXERCISES THE BELIEVER'S PRIVILEGE.

1. Hezekiah in trouble does but share the common portion of man, "who is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward,"—or of God's people, who are often "chastened of the Lord that they may not be condemned with the world." (1 Cor. xi. 32.) To be exempt from chastisement raises a doubt of our sonship. (Heb. xii. 4—8.)

2. In all such cases the believer has a peculiar privilege,—he has access to God in prayer—a friend near and dear, faithful and true, able and willing, a refuge, a hiding-place. He is encouraged to fly to Him—*By many precious promises.* "Call upon me in the day of trouble," &c. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." "The Holy Ghost to comfort you," &c.

—*By many encouraging examples.* David, who “strengthened himself in the Lord.” Jonah in the whale’s belly. Daniel in the lions’ den. The three children in the furnace. Paul, “with whom the Lord stood when all men forsook him.”

—*By his own blessed experience,*—“He that delivered me from the paw of the lion, &c., will deliver.” This was not the first time that Hezekiah had run into this refuge, and had been safe. Thus he exercised the believer’s privilege.

II. IN THIS HE ALSO DISCOVERED A TRAIT IN THE BELIEVER’S CHARACTER. The conduct of men under sudden circumstances of distress often betrays character.

1. See the worldly man in trouble.

Some rise to the occasion,—“The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity,” and energies, powers are elicited not before known. Others show temper, passion, &c. Some fly to friends,—some yield to weakness and despondency,—but none go to God!

2. The believer in distress of mind, body, or estate, spontaneously flies to his God!

Why? Why does the frightened brood fly to the parent wing? The scattered sheep to the shepherd? The terrified child to its mother’s bosom? Why? because they have been there before—often—and always safe.

—It is an instinct, equally strong, in God’s people, that impels them to Him! “Lord, to whom shall we go?” &c. Thus Hezekiah, “when he heard the blasphemy (ver. 1), rent his clothes, and went up to the house of the Lord.” And when a second message came (Ver. 10—13), and “a letter,” “he went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord!” This was his first, natural, spontaneous act,—it was a trait of character.

III. AN EDIFYING EXAMPLE OF BELIEVING PRAYER.

1. We have much need of help and instruction about prayer.

—*Some do not pray at all,*—without God, &c.

—*Many pray with mere formality*—say their prayers.

—*Many are unskilful in prayer:* all feel its difficulty who try to pray in earnest—no thoughts, no desires, no earnestness.

2. The peculiarity of Hezekiah’s prayer:

—it was not only fervent, earnest, believing, but it was *particular*: see, he takes up the very letter itself into God’s house—“spreads it

out before the Lord." His prayer is a comment on it! (Ver. 15—19),—reasons about it, pleads out of it, enters into minute details. Just as David,—“I showed before Him my trouble.” (Psalm cxlii. 1—3.) As Jacob,—“Deliver me from the hand of my brother Esau.” (Genesis xxxii. 11.)

3. Here we discover the reason of so many failures in prayer :

—The want of *particularity*,—we confess, we mourn, we lament—in general language,—we do not enter into this sin, and that trouble,—we do not name people and places before God. We feel as if God were at too great a distance from us. We do not realize his interest in every care, anxiety, trouble. The painful “letter” is not spread out before Him on our knees,—we do not complain to Him of this person and that.

—*God is well pleased with such prayer as Hezekiah's.* He enters into every detail of life,—not a “sparrow falls without Him,”—“He numbers our very hairs,”—and when his troubled people talk to Him as to a friend, He listens with a Father's love.

—*Such prayer begets prayer*—opens the mouth and the heart—moves the soul—affects the suppliant with tender feelings—confiding, reposing, resting in one near and interested in us. Take everything to God—nothing is too minute—nothing trifling to Him.

This subject suggests self-examination, and may discover character. Do we fly to God in trouble, naturally? Is prayer our refuge, comfort, delight? If not, we know not God,—we want to be converted by his grace, to be “born again!”

Are our communications with God in secret, dark, cold, heavy? Is prayer to us a task and a difficulty? Do we find ourselves even worse when we try to pray? This betrays a habit of mind—a *worldly habit*! How can we expect, if we live all our time in the ardent pursuit of the world, that the moment we kneel down, or for ten minutes or so, we shall be *spiritual*? A heart habitually alienated from God, cannot pray at the stated moment! We must “live in the Spirit,” and “walk in the Spirit,” if we would “pray in the Spirit!” We may seem worse when we try to pray than we are at other times—but it is not so! It is only that our habitual worldliness and unfaithfulness then appear! Oh! for a new heart and a praying spirit! (Zech. xii. 10.)

LXXI.

HEAVENLY MANSIONS.

John xiv. 1—3. *“Let not your heart be troubled : ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions : if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself ; that where I am, there ye may be also.”*

WITH these and many like words Jesus comforted his disciples in the immediate prospect of his departure,—“These things have I spoken unto you before they come to pass, that when they are come to pass,” &c.

—They are recorded for our consolation on whom the ends of the world are come, and they will be the support of his Church until they are accomplished by his return. May the Holy Spirit enable us to understand them, and apply them to our hearts with power.

I. WE LEARN WHERE OUR ABSENT LORD IS GONE :

—To his “Father’s house”—commonly called “heaven.” “He is gone into heaven.” (Heb. ix. 24 ; 1 Peter iii. 22.) It is “where He was before.” (Chap. vi. 62.) “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world ; and again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.” (xvi. 28.) Surely here He “spake plainly.” “I ascend up to the Father.” (xx. 17.) Or chap. xiii. 1—3—“Came from God, and went to God.” Or Ephes. iv. 8—10, quoting Psalm lxviii. It would seem impossible that any could doubt where our Lord is,—yet, for the sake of a system, some do so.

II. THERE ARE THE ETERNAL RESTING-PLACES OF HIS PEOPLE.

“In my Father’s house”—that house where Christ now is—“are many mansions.” The modern use of this word has confused this beautiful passage. A mansion did not formerly mean a great house or palace, but, from its derivation, simply “a resting-place,” without reference to size or grandeur. The same as “*manse*,” the minister’s house—i.e., his abiding-place. “In my Father’s house are many resting-places”—“many”—enough for you and for all,—“if it had not been so I would have told you.”

III. WHAT IS CHRIST DOING THERE ?

He is "preparing a place for us !" Getting heaven ready for us—a place for each of his redeemed.

—*By continuing and completing his mediatorial office.* "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." (Heb. vii. 25.) "He appears in the presence of God for us."

—*Our perpetual mediator, intercessor, "advocate."* (1 John ii. 1.)

—*He is claiming for and conferring on us the Holy Spirit.* (Acts ii. 33.) "Received the promise of the Father, and shed forth this," &c. Thus preparing his people for their place, and their place for them. (1 Peter i. 3—5.) "Reserved in heaven for you," &c.

IV. HE WILL COME AGAIN TO RECEIVE US TO THAT HOUSE.

"I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, ye may be also." "Receive you"—"take you away," as the bridegroom takes the bride away from her father's house to his own : that is the strict import of the word. The promise of his second coming oft repeated. (Acts i. 11 ; and iii. 21.) The great future of the new covenant. The conclusion is inevitable. He was leaving the world—going away to his Father, to his Father's house, to heaven : there are the resting-places of his people. When He comes again, He will take his people away to the same place, "and so they shall be ever with the Lord !" Very strange all this if heaven is not somewhere away from this earth. No simple student of Scripture could have thought otherwise, but for the sake of a system.

V. HENCE THE STRONG CONSOLATION TO HIS PEOPLE. "Let not your heart be troubled : ye believe in God, believe also in me."

—*Look upward, onward, forward :*—trouble you must have—affliction, temptation, trial, manifold—but "let not YOUR HEART be troubled !" Here is *heart-rest*, here is comfort in trouble—the sure promise of deliverance out of it : the eternal rest and reward. "For we know that if our earthly house were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house—eternal—in the heavens." (2 Cor. v. 1.) See, Jesus is there—our forerunner, our federal head and representative, and "Where he is, there shall his redeemed at length be."

VI. BUT FOR WHOM ARE THESE BLESSED PLACES PREPARED ? For all ? for the whole human race ? Alas, no ! for believers only. "Ye believe in God : believe also in me !" Therefore be not troubled !

—*How everything turns on faith !* If ye believe not in God, nor in

Christ, no place, no rest, no house for you! "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned!" (Mark xvi. 15, 16.) "He that believeth on the Son of God hath eternal life—and he that believeth not, shall not see life; wrath abideth on him." (John iii. 36.) Oh! what an alternative! To rest with Christ in his Father's house, or "to lift up our eyes in hell, being in torments!" And all depending on that little word, BELIEVE!

—*Search, and see whether "ye believe in God, and also in Christ!"* Don't hastily conclude that you do so: it is no slight, easy, or common thing to believe! To say our creed is easy—to confess the truth of Revelation, easy—but to believe in the heart, and to show it in the life, is neither easy nor common. Faith is God's gift—seek it! it comes of grace, pray for it!

—*And believing, trusting, hoping,* that you are reconciled to God by faith in Jesus—behold your happy home, your Father's house, you will soon be there! Cheer up, struggling, fainting brother—"Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." (Romans xiii. 11.)

LXXII.

ORDINATION OR VISITATION.

Canticles, or the Song of Solomon, i. 6. "*They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept.*"

THIS is a poem highly symbolical and figurative, and purely spiritual. The application of this metaphor to the work of the Christian ministry harmonizes with the character of this poem, and with the frequent allusions of other Scriptures. Both in the Old and New Testament the vineyard is the Church; the keepers are the pastors, teachers, evangelists; these are liable to the danger suggested in the text, that of neglecting their own souls while they are occupied with the care of others. Let us consider—

I. THE VINEYARD AND ITS KEEPER. "The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel," &c. (Isaiah v. 1, 7.) "The vineyard which his right hand had planted." (Psalm lxxx. 15.) "A vineyard of red wine." (Isaiah xxvii. 2.) "Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard," &c. (Jeremiah xii. 10.) So Matt. xx. 1—16. The vine-dressers are the pastors. A keeper of the vineyard must be—

—*A man of ceaseless toil*—in all seasons, in all weathers, hardship, industry, labour.

—*A man of skill and science in his work*—he must understand the plant, the soil, the aspect, the culture, the training, to prune, to gather fruit.

—*He must prepare for delays and disappointments*—frosts, blights, insects, floods, droughts.

—*He is wholly dependant on the Lord of Harvests for the result.* He cannot command the clouds, nor the sun—he cannot make it grow—"It groweth he knoweth not how." (Mark iv. 27.)

Every one of these characteristics of the vine-dresser apply with tenfold force to the keeper of spiritual vineyards, to him who cultivates souls. Oh, what industry, skill, diligence, faith, patience, prayer, spirituality, are needed for him! But consider—

II. THE SPECIAL DANGER AGAINST WHICH SUCH AN ONE IS WARNED IN THE TEXT: "They made me a keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept." He neglected his own interests, so occupied was he about those of others.

—*A man may "preach to others and be himself a castaway."* This not uncommon—lamentable cases occur. There may be diligence, activity, zeal, in all clerical duties, while the heart is far from God—sometimes the prey of secret sin—such as lust, or intoxication, or dishonesty. Holy orders don't always make holy hearts! How deplorable such cases! How frightful for the individual, how ruinous to the Church.

—But more than this—*There is a tendency in the work itself in some cases, to endanger the soul of the workman!* The reverse often expected by the young pastor! Always reading, praying with the people, teaching, visiting, Sabbaths and all days—holy effect on selves! Alas! no! often so busy about others forget selves! Private prayer, self-culture, quiet moments with God, are shortened, "straitened"—this perilous. Social meetings, Committees, cate-

chising, bustling from duty to duty, do not tend to "growth in grace." Often more secular business thrown on the clergy by thoughtless laity—and so the springs of the inner life in the pastor are dried up—his work becomes *perfunctory*, systematic, hurried, forced, confused—"his own soul has he not kept."

III. CONSIDER HOW MUCH THE GOOD KEEPING OF OUR OWN VINEYARD MAY PROMOTE THE BETTER KEEPING OF OTHERS: or the influence of the private life and character of the pastor on his works and among his people. See this influence—

1. FOR EVIL :

—If there be no reality, life, power, vitality, in the pastor's own soul; no deep experience, no warm love, no steadfast faith—how hard to speak of what he does not feel! how cold, dead, dull, dry, will be even "the letter" of truth, uttered by such lips! To point to a Saviour who is no Saviour to me! to tell of grace which works not in me. Oh! how terrible—what a hypocrite I feel!

—*So of his life and example*:—one hasty expression, one injudicious act, one instance of inconsistency, of passion, impurity, meanness, covetousness, will destroy the influence of many sermons, however good. "Our parson preaches well enough, but he is not a good liver"—condemns any ministry. On the other hand, see the influence of personal sanctity and piety—

2. FOR GOOD !

—*The silent persuasion of a godly life*—no affectation of dress or manners, but a man of God everywhere—in the bosom of his family, in the sanctity of home, among servants, dependents—a quiet, pure, lovely, gentle, but firm and consistent course,—how it tells on the public ministry! One act of self-denying kindness—abstinence from drinks, or luxuries, for love and example sake—tenderness and delicacy of feeling towards the humble and poor—these give power, pungency, a vitality to the public word.

—*Besides, as your own soul flourishes in secret, so will your preaching be influential*. When we stand up with a heart full of love, full of mercy received, glowing with gratitude, steeped afresh with the morning dew of early secret intercourse with God—oh, what "power" accompanies the Word! We are no longer actors, or retailers of other men's thoughts—"We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen"—"We comfort others with the same comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." (2 Cor. i. 3—6.) A sympathizing Saviour—(Isaiah l. 4)—must have a

sympathizing messenger, "One who can weep with those that weep," &c.

1. *Let us (the ministers of Christ) resolve, in his strength, that nothing shall rob us of our hour of secret devotion, personal study of the Word, and holy exercises.*

2. *Let us habitually regard ourselves not in our professional character, but as individual sinners, needing mercy.*

3. *Let us endeavour to gather food for our own souls while feeding those of others—to make each relative act personal, our own—to pray for ourselves when praying for others, &c.*

4. *Let us never forget that no amount of talent, or even of piety in us, can secure, much less merit success.* The Lord of the vineyard alone can give it! We must pray, "Awake, O north wind," &c. (Chap. iv. 16.) "Be patient," &c. (James v. 7, 8.) "The former and the latter rain!" "Paul and Apollos." (1 Cor. iii. 6.)

LXXIII.

CHRISTMAS.

Galatians iv. 4—6. "*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father!*"

A MERCIFUL God permits us once more to witness this happy season, and to commemorate the great love of God to us in Christ Jesus! Oh that we could estimate the blessing aright—that we could adequately praise Him, and prove our gratitude by a cheerful surrender of ourselves to his service! May the Holy Spirit help our infirmities, while we meditate on "the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh!" Let us consider—

I. WHAT GOD HATH DONE FOR US.

II. THE BENEFITS HE HAS SECURED TO US.

I. WHAT GOD HATH DONE FOR US.

1. Note, who it is that hath done this :—

—“God,” the Father Almighty. The great and holy and offended Deity. HE it was who loved the world and gave his Son. That Son came, voluntarily, and of his own love—but the Father sent Him, gave Him up. “Herein is love,” &c. (1 John iv. 9, 10; Psalm xl. 7, 8.)

2. What He did for us—

—“Sent forth his Son”—God’s infinite gift, heaven’s brightest gem—a gift which comprised all others—“Given us his Son, given us all things.” (Rom. viii. 32.) What a gift—what a mission !

3. How He sent Him forth :—

(a) “*Made of a woman*”—What can this mean? is not every man woman-born and made of a woman? Besides, whence came He? He was sent forth from some place, and sent into another,—this world, and He came into the world, “made of a woman.” Does it not go far to prove his Divine pre-existence, and his real manhood? Does it not indicate something peculiar, something out of the ordinary course?

—“Made of a woman,” denotes more! it fulfils the prophecies,—“That a virgin should conceive and bear a son.” (Isaiah vii. 14, *cum* Matt. i. 23.) “God sent forth his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.” (Rom. viii. 3.) “A woman shall compass a man.” (Jer. xxxi. 22.) “Appeared in fashion as a man,” but was emphatically the “seed of the woman.” (Genesis iii. 15.) “The Word was made flesh.” (John i. 14.) “Made of the seed of David.” (Romans i. 3, 4; Heb. ii. 14—17.)

(b) “*Made under the law* :”—born a Jew—lineally bound by Mosaic covenant and dispensation. From infancy to manhood obedient to the law—circumcised the eighth day—presented in temple—redeemed by sacrifice—kept the feasts—frequented the temple—recognised the priesthood—fulfilled the whole law, ceremonial and moral, for us : and yet submitted to the penalty of a broken law, to atone for our guilt.

4. When did God do all this?

“In the fulness of the time”—“When the fulness of the time

was come." The moment fixed from all eternity—completed, accomplished—then true as all nature to an instant, at the prophetic time, long expected, apparently long delayed, but really true to a second—THEN the event took place, and "Jesus was born in Bethlehem." "In the dispensation of the fulness of time." (Ephes. i. 10.) "The hour was come!"

II. THE BENEFITS THUS OBTAINED FOR US.

1. Redemption!

"To redeem them that were under the law." Primarily the Jews. (Ver. 1—5.) But the whole argument of preceding chapter proved Gentiles included. All are, or were, "under the law." Its enactments passed upon us all—and all have sinned, and all must have "Redemption through his blood." From the curse of the law, the guilt of sin, its sting in conscience, its dominion, power: forgiveness of sins, peace with God.

2. "Adoption."

That we might receive "the adoption of sons." Adoption is the taking of another person's child, and dealing with it as our own, admitting it to all the same privileges, endearments, inheritances, as if born heir to them.

—*We were all by nature the children of Satan*—born in sin, heirs of guilt, sorrow, shame, death, and eternal perdition,—every child of fallen Adam is thus a "cursed child,"—"children of wrath, even as others." (Eph. ii. 3.)

—*By virtue of Christ, and our interest in Him, we become children of God—children of grace.* "We receive the adoption of sons." Being born again, born from above, "new creatures in Christ Jesus," we become members of the family of God, "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." (Rom. viii. 17.) "The sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. vi. 18.)

3. "The Spirit of adoption."

A man may be adopted and not know it, therefore an additional mercy secured. (Ver. 6.) "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father!" A child's spirit, a child's love, affection, dependance—no longer "servants" (ver. 7), "but sons," and therefore filled with all the sweet confidence of children. "The spirit," mind, temper of "the Son" Jesus. As the Father loves the Son, and the Son the Father, so the children of God love Him. "Whom having not seen we love," &c. (1 Peter i. 8.)

These are some of the blessings which should fill our hearts with joy at this holy season:—are you partakers of them? Have you an interest in Jesus? He is born in vain for many! And many rejoice at this season with carnal mirth who will “mourn at the last!” yea, for ever and ever!—Before we can rejoice with Christ we must weep with Him. We must mourn over the sins which brought Him down from heaven to earth—which constrained Him to take our nature upon Him—which made Him “womanborn,” and, therefore, a child of sorrow, care, and woe, and doomed Him to the death of the cross! Let tears of penitence mingle with tears of joy as we view that Babe!

LXXIV.

SUBMIT TO GOD—RESIST THE DEVIL.

James iv. 7. *“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*

THERE may be some “fools who say in their heart, There is no God”—there may be more who believe that there is no devil—no being, person, individual, or spirit, so called—that only a principle of evil is intended by such terms:—then is God only a principle of good, and not a being, or person—for here God and the devil are placed in opposition to each other,—we are exhorted to submit to the one and resist the other, and both are placed in the same category! O Lord, save us by thy Holy Spirit from unbelief, and enable us to receive thy Word in meekness!

Here is a twofold exhortation. Let us,

I. EXPLAIN IT.

II. ENFORCE IT.

I. EXPLAIN THIS TWOFOLD EXHORTATION.

1. “Submit yourselves to God.”

This is the constant language of Scripture. “God giveth grace to

the humble." "Humble yourselves in the sight of God." (Ver. 6 and 10.) "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." (1 Peter v. 6.) "*Submit*"—lay down the arms of your rebellion, for all by nature are rebels, "and fight against God."

—*Submit to his revealed truth*—receive with humility the great facts of the Gospel, that God became man, and as man and God lived and died, in our place and stead, &c.

—*Submit to the great doctrines* built on those facts: redemption, atonement, imputed righteousness, the substitution of Christ for the sinner—"the just in the place of the unjust"—the good for the bad.

—*Submit to be saved by grace alone through faith*—the gift of God to undeserving, lost, and ruined sinners.

—*Submit to God's holy commandments* as the rule of your conduct, as the will of your Father, as the test of your love and obedience.

—*Submit yourselves to his Divine appointments* and Providential decrees:—receive sorrow, trial, pain, grief, poverty, contempt, and any evil at his hands, and "take it patiently"—"It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good."

—Oh! perfect and entire submission to Divine love, wisdom, faithfulness in all things—how blessed! This is the command.

2. "Resist the devil."

Who is he? whence came he? is there more than one spirit of evil? Many vain questions might be asked; but all that God has told us is, that devils were once holy angels—that they fell, became hopelessly wicked—that they are numerous, and that they have "a chief," a head, "Satan," "Beelzebub," &c.

—*This evil spirit reigns absolutely over the ungodly.*

—*This spirit torments, tempts, tries, frightens, ensnares believers.* He is to them as "a roaring lion"—sometimes disguised as an "angel of light." (2 Cor. xi. 14.)

—*This great spirit of evil we are to resist.* How? We must "renounce the devil," cast off his power and government by an act of faith, saying, "Get thee hence, Satan." We must watch and pray against him. (1 Peter v. 8, 9.) Special armour and weapons are provided us against him—study Ephesians vi. 10—18. We must look to Jesus, who has conquered Satan for us—"Nailed him to his cross." (Colos. ii. 14, 15.) This must be a life-long conflict.

II. ENFORCE THE EXHORTATION.

1. "Submit yourselves to God"—lay down the arms of your rebellion contend no more with the Almighty.

- (a) *Because if you do not you will be crushed by Him!* The knee that will not bend, must break: the “stone rejected” will “grind” the rebellious sinner “to powder.” (Matt. xxi. 41.) Who will contend with his Maker? Who will abide the day of his coming? “To execute judgment.” (Jude 14, 15.) “Punished with everlasting destruction.” (2 Thess. i. 7—10.) “All will wail because of Him.” (Rev. i. 7.)
- (b) *Because if you do submit you shall find present blessedness and future glory!* Who can tell the peace, the joy, comfort, consolation, rest, repose, satisfaction, diffused through the soul that has fully submitted all to God! Trials, burdens, temptations, conflicts, may be sharp and sad—but *peace* does not depart, nor holy confidence in infinite love and goodness. And this life over—what then? Ask the angels, ask the spirits of just men made perfect—them that sleep in Jesus—is it not “*far better?*” Wherefore submit yourselves—for if ye do not ye perish, if you do you are saved and blessed.

2. “RESIST THE DEVIL.”

- (a) *Because if you do not he will have your soul and body in hell fire!* Awful words!—not mine, but “the words of the Lord Jesus.” (Matt. v. 22, 29; x. 28; xviii. 9; xxiii. 33; Luke xvi. 23.) Let men explain them away at their peril! But God deliver us from this additional wickedness!
- (b) *Because if you do “resist, he will flee from you!”* Here are conquest, victory, triumph, assured to all who resist in faith! Not mere escape, deliverance—your enemy shall be routed, he shall fly in terror. The name of Jesus is above every name—let believers try it—boldly oppose his temptations, terrors, snares, confident in success—and Satan is a coward, and will flee away!
—And a glorious triumph awaits you hereafter. You shall see Satan, his angels, and wicked men, driven away into “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord”—and while you mourn, weep, tremble, you shall be borne of angels into the bosom of Jehovah!

Here then, are the two marvellous powers—God and Satan, Christ and Belial. We are all at this moment the servants of one or other of these! Are you the children of God, or the children of the wicked one? Oh! solve the question, delay not, tarry not—time is short, death is near—seize the moment of mercy—“submit yourselves to God—resist the devil!”

—Remember, grace is promised, specially for this conflict ! Christ has prayed for us (Luke xxii. 31), and an apostle says, “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” (Rom. xvi. 20.) He is “a strong man armed, but Christ is stronger than he.” (Luke xi. 21.) Therefore fear not, “Be strong—yea, be strong !”

LXXV.

ENTHUSIASM VINDICATED.

Galatians iv. 18. “*But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing.*”

THE apostle is here condemning spurious and schismatical zeal :—“They zealously affect you, but not well.” But in doing so he justifies and commends genuine zeal, rightly directed—“But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing :”—the “zealous affection” is good, so it be but rightly directed.

May the Spirit of God bless our meditations while from this assertion of the apostle I take occasion

I. TO VINDICATE ZEAL IN RELIGION.

II. TO EXPOSE SPURIOUS ZEAL.

III. TO EXHIBIT THE MARKS OF GENUINE ZEAL.

I. The “zealous affection,” of which the apostle speaks, is in itself a mere impulse, a strong determination of the will and purpose of man in any direction, or towards any object.

1. This impulse or affection is admired in everything but in religion.

(a) *The world applauds enthusiasm* in arts, in arms, in science—no great work has ever been accomplished without it. The student, the philosopher, the naturalist, the traveller, even the tradesman and merchant, succeeds only in proportion to his zeal and enthusiasm, and the world applauds.

- (b) *The world sneers, ridicules, and condemns the same "zealous affection" in matters of religion.* That which is good in everything else is bad in religion; a zealous man of the world is to be commended, a zealous Christian to be condemned! "Be not righteous over much!" "Do not carry things too far." "Too much learning hath made thee mad." "Whence came this mad fellow to thee?"

2. Yet it is reasonable that our zeal in any cause should be measured by its importance.

Thus in the things of this world men devote time, money, talents, yea life itself, because they think they pursue the chief good. —*Surely, then, religion, the cause of the soul, eternity, salvation, demand our greatest energies.* By how much the soul is more valuable than the body, eternity than time, heaven than earth, by so much ought this "zealous affection" to be more ardent in religion than in anything else.

3. The Word of God vindicates it both by example and precept.

This induced Abraham to renounce his father's house, and Moses to give up all the treasures of Egypt, and this moved all the men of faith, "who showed plainly that they sought a country." (Heb. xi.) This zeal, "eating him up," brought the Son of God from heaven to earth. And St. Paul both vindicates and exemplifies it—"For the love of Christ constraineth us," &c. (2 Cor. v. 13—15.) While (Rev. iii. 15, 16) Christ declares that He will "spue the lukewarm out of his mouth."

4. Those who condemn zeal and enthusiasm in religion generally do so to cover and palliate their own indifference.

Cold, calculating formalists generally protest against enthusiasm.

II. EXPOSE SPURIOUS ZEAL.

1. When personal interest is the secret motive.

Their zeal subserved party purposes. So some at Rome "preached the Gospel of envy and strife." And thus Jehu, of old, "Come and see my zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings x. 16)—but his zeal was selfish and vain. Under all such circumstances zeal is to be suspected.

2. When the objects of pursuit are either erroneous or trifling.

"They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge," &c. (Romans x. 2.) St. Paul himself, before and after his conversion, was equally zealous; his zeal was wrong in the former, and right in the latter case. The zeal of the Pharisees. The zeal of all who con-

tend with vehemence for the non-essentials of religion, overlooking conversion, grace, salvation, holiness!

3. When zeal even in a good cause is rash, headstrong, and, above all, intolerant and uncharitable; or when it is uncertain, fitful, and fickle:

—Any cause, however excellent, is damaged by such zeal.

4. When our zeal for God is chiefly public, and before men, and the holy impulse is not carried through domestic, social, and private duties:

Such zeal to be questioned.

III. EXHIBIT THE MARKS OF GENUINE RELIGIOUS ZEAL.

1.. Define it.

It is a hallowed flame from heaven—it is the “love of Christ” which “constrains,” sweeps us away like a torrent. It is gratitude, a sense of mercy received—it is a jealousy for the glory of God—a burning thirst for the salvation of souls—it is the gift of God, the work of the Spirit in the soul: the fruit of salvation embraced and enjoyed.

2. It is invariably controlled and guided by the written Word of God.

The Scriptures are the *rail*, zeal is the *steam-power*—keep to the rail and any pace is safe:—start off the rail, and we know the consequences: the power cannot be too strong, nor the impulse too ardent, so that we keep to the Word of God for guidance.

3. Such zeal will always be directed towards great and worthy objects:—

God’s glory, and the salvation of sinners—nothing less—it cannot expend itself in trifles, in ceremonials, in nice controversial distinctions.

4. This affection is permanent and lasting.

—*It is unquenchable*—“Many waters cannot quench love.”

—*It is uniform and continuous*—not fitful, occasional.

—*It is universally diffused*—over the whole life and actions.

—*Tempered by wisdom and discretion*:—“Spirit of power and love, and of a sound mind.”

—Such a spirit of holy zeal will surmount all difficulties, and carry a person through all temptations and trials to glory.

—Brethren, how is this with you?

1. *Are you calm, prudent, cautious, reserved in religion?*—Beware! your prudence may be indifference, your caution coldness, your reserve heartlessness! Compare yourself with the ancient saints, with those of the apostolic age, with modern martyrs—have you their zeal, love, earnestness? Be persuaded that the wildest zeal, if honest, is less dangerous than cool, careless indifference! God will reject you, Christ will disown you, if you are—LUKEWARM!

2. *Are you ardent, zealous, enthusiastic, in the cause of God at large, and of your own soul in particular?* It is well! Thank God, who has kindled a holy fire in your bosom—cherish it, watch over it, it is liable to grow dim and feeble—to be quenched, if not extinguished—feed it with prayer, meditation, the means of grace;—but remember, you must correct, guide, and chasten it by the sober truths of the written Word! That your zeal may be steady, uniform, diffusive, influential in your life, in private and public—so God shall be glorified in you.

[This subject might be profitably applied to any religious cause—missionary, benevolent, &c.]

LXXVI.

FAMILY AFFLICTIONS.

John xi. 3. “*Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.*”

“THE man Christ Jesus,” in social life, discovering the sympathies of human nature, while He displayed his Divine power! The family circle at Bethany, often cheered with his presence, now in affliction—they mourn his absence. May God bless our meditations!

I. THE AFFLICTIONS OF THE FAMILY AT BETHANY.

II. THE PURPOSE OF GOD IN THOSE AFFLICTIONS.

I. 1. The simple story:—

A brother and two sisters lived together—Jesus had long been

acquainted with them—"He loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." While Jesus was absent, though not far distant, Lazarus fell sick: confident in the power and willingness of Jesus to heal him, "the sisters sent to Him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." But Jesus regarded them not. He "abode two days still in the same place, where He was." Meanwhile the sufferer grew worse—still Jesus came not! The hearts of the sisters were heavy, and soon their cup of misery was full—their brother died: the last sad office is performed, their brother is buried—now all hope is quenched, "he sees corruption," and yet Jesus came not. The stranger, even the enemy, experienced his healing power, but "his friend Lazarus" is left to sicken and die unheeded. "The faith of the pious sisters was staggered by his apparent neglect. "Lord," said each of them to Him when He did come;—"Lord, if thou hadst been here, our brother had not died." The trial was almost too much for them to bear.

2. What a picture of life!

- (a) *Of the common portion of humanity:* how do our pleasant things fade away! Brightest and fairest often the soonest! Life, health, dearest objects of affection, property, reputation, honour, glory—all quickly gone!
- (b) *God's people not exempt:* "Behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth," &c. See Jacob, Joseph, David, Hezekiah, all! "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," &c. Some in deep poverty, some in sickness, some in bereavement, domestic trials, &c.
- (c) *All occasionally aggravated by spiritual desertion.* The sorrowing sisters appeared to be forgotten by their Lord—He hid Himself from them. The tendency of affliction to produce mental and spiritual depression—the mind and nerves are shaken, incapable of judging of our spiritual state; therefore think that God has forsaken us: the spirit is broken. Like Hezekiah (Isaiah xxxviii. 14)—"Mourn as a dove," &c.
- (d) *Under such circumstances, how difficult to trust in God, and be at peace!*—These sisters questioned the love of Jesus, and almost reproached Him when He came! So even Job lamented himself, and desired death! Jeremiah cursed the day of his birth—Elijah sat down under a juniper-tree and wished himself dead—Jacob "refused to be comforted"—and many of God's people have been tempted to similar impatience under such heavy afflictions. It is not every one who can say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in

Him"—“It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good;” or, “Who against hope believe in hope.” (Romans iv. 18.)

II. THE PURPOSE OF GOD IN THESE AFFLICTIONS.

1. The happiness of these sisters was promoted and augmented:—

—Much anguish of mind was first occasioned, and many bitter tears were shed; but when they received their dead brother from the grave they experienced happiness and delight otherwise inconceivable!

—*Even so with God's people!* Often, even in this world, their real happiness is promoted by their afflictions! They live to see the “end of the Lord;” as St. James saith of Job's case—“That He is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” (James v. 11.) The things we most deplored have proved blessings in disguise: and those denied us were denied in wisdom and love.

2. Great spiritual benefits were conferred on the mourners.

Martha had been “careful and troubled about many things;” now she was taught their vanity. What glorious prospects were opened to her and her sister! (Ver. 24—27.) “Life and immortality brought to light” to them—neither they nor we had possessed those precious promises but for their afflictions! What lessons of faith and love did they learn at the grave of their brother!

—*Such is the uniform object of all our afflictions*—our spiritual benefit. Graces are to be cultivated, corruptions are to be subdued. Afflictions are not sent merely to try our patience in suffering, but to teach us lessons which are not otherwise to be learned. We should not suffer as angels, but as sinners; asking, “wherefore the Lord contendeth with us.”

3. New discoveries of the love of Jesus were made by this afflicted family.

When they heard that voice—“Lazarus, come forth”—when they saw the dead arise—embraced their risen brother—witnessed the tenderness of Jesus—his power, his love—then they knew Him as they never knew Him before! “What manner of man was this?”

—*It is in the school of affliction* that the love, power, wisdom, faithfulness, and glory of Christ, are so taught and learned as they are taught nowhere else! “Chosen in the furnace of affliction.” Would we see the stars in the day-time, we must descend into a deep pit—would we see the special glory and preciousness of Christ, we must go down into the pit of sorrow.

4. Christ was glorified in the afflictions of this family (ver. 4 and 15):

—How their friends and acquaintance gathered around them—how touching and edifying was their sorrow—how subdued and holy their joy! Christ was glorified in the risen Lazarus; he was a witness of his power! Many unbelieving Jews were converted by that sight.

—*A purpose of God in the afflictions of his people is his own glory:*

—“Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” (Isaiah xlix. 3.) “I am glorified in them.” (John xvii. 10.) “They glorified God in me,” saith St. Paul. “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit,” saith Jesus. God’s people are afflicted for the good of others, as reflectors of God’s image—to discover his love, power, wisdom, and goodness, through them, to the world. They thus “manifest forth his glory.”

How blessed are they whom Jesus loves! They may be afflicted, chastened, tried, tempted—but He loves them, cares for them, never leaves them—makes all work together for their good!

How miserable are they who know not that love! Mourners all must be, but without a Comforter—afflicted, but not cared for—sick, sad, miserable, without a Saviour!

Oh, seek an interest in the love of Christ.

LXXVII.

LYDIA'S CONVERSION.

Acts xvi. 14. “*Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul.*”

THE apostles desired to evangelize Proconsular Asia, “but the time was not come.” “They were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia.” (Ver. 6.) Why? who can tell? They did not know themselves! The Lord the Spirit did not will it! “He openeth, and no man shutteth, and He shutteth and no man openeth!” They then “assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not!” (Ver. 7.) Another door was shut: so saith “the Spirit who divideth to

every man severally as he will." (1 Cor. xii. 11.) Other work was determined for them—they were directed by vision to go into Macedonia—Europe was to be evangelized. Every circumstance connected with this event must be deeply interesting to *us*!

May this Divine Spirit open the door of our hearts, that we may receive and embrace the truth.

I. CONSIDER, AND COMMENT ON THIS BEAUTIFUL NARRATIVE.

II. SHOW THE GREAT TRUTHS WHICH IT ILLUSTRATES.

I. THE NARRATIVE ITSELF.

—*See that little bark*—(ver. 11)—the wind is fair, "*their course is straight*"—on board is a little band of faithful men—Paul and Silas, Luke and Timothy—they reach the haven, furl their white sail, and land at a port near Philippi. *It is a great and busy city*—no sensation is created—light has stolen in unperceived—noiseless are the footsteps of mercy! A kingdom is about to be erected—"but it cometh not with observation!" (Luke xvii. 20.) Its founder "did not strive nor cry!" "*Certain days*" elapsed, and *nothing was done*: inactivity, to try their faith and patience. *At length the blessed Sabbath comes*—they hear of a retired spot "without the city," "where prayer was wont to be made." They resort thither: and there they find *only a few women*! Where were the men? They were too busy, or too idle, or too proud to come! Blessed women who serve the Lord, let them not be ashamed of Him! *St. Paul did not despise the little company*:—he preached, but his sermon is not recorded. *See its effects*: he preached to all the women who resorted there—but *one* only attended to him! They all heard the same discourse—but to one only was it effectual! Why was this? Because of her only it is said—"The Lord opened the heart of Lydia, that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul!" Though a *devout* person, her heart was shut against Gospel truth until the Lord opened it—and when He opened it, she joyfully received the truth in the love of it—and showed, by her subsequent conduct, "that she had not received the grace of God in vain." (Ver. 15.) Such was the first convert in Europe, a poor despised Jewess!

II. THE GREAT TRUTHS WHICH THIS STORY ILLUSTRATES.

1. The state of all hearts by nature.

—"Shut" against God's truth: there may be certain pious sensations, and a careful performance of Sabbath duties, and the exercise of many attractive moral qualities, and yet the heart may be barred and bolted against the truth! The heart by nature is like a house shut up—prejudice, ignorance, and "*enmity*," to the truth are its bolts and bars against the Gospel. "Having the understanding darkened," &c. (Ephes. iv. 18.) "Ye were some time," that is formerly, previous to conversion—"darkness"—not merely dark, but darkness itself! On some Satan thickens this darkness—"The god of this world blinds them," &c. (2 Cor. iv. 4.) And in others *vice*! See James i. 21. But as here, Lydia, so *all*, even of the most religiously disposed, were dark and blind by nature, as Nicodemus (John iii. 1, &c.)—as Nathanael (John i. 47)—as Cornelius, and many others.

2. The means of grace are appointed for the Divine illumination of souls.

—*Had Lydia neglected public worship that day she might have perished!* She might have said, "It is of no use, there are only a few women; I have often been in vain, I am busy to-day, I cannot go," &c.—but, on the contrary, she devoutly came—there she found an unexpected teacher—God met with her, and blessed her to her soul's salvation!

—*So we must use our means of grace.* If we neglect the house of God, the secret chamber, and the holy sacraments, we may lose salvation. But waiting, in the diligent observance of these holy ordinances, we may confidently expect God's favour.

3. But there is no certain blessing infallibly accompanying even God's own ordinances.

—Other women were present on this occasion, but of only one do we read that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul. They heard the same sermon, had the same advantages; but only one woman profited!

—*How sad and true a picture of ourselves!* How many hear, how few "*attend!*" Of those who attend, how few are abidingly impressed, and "*obey the Gospel!*" Even of those who approach the table of the Lord, some derive no benefit; there is no certain and efficacious grace connected with the ordinance. The most fearful calls of Providence produce no effect on hundreds. It is still only "here one and there one; one of a city and two of a family." (Jer. iii. 14.) "One is taken, and another left." "Many are called, and few are chosen." "Many widows were in Israel; . . . but

unto none was Elias sent but unto a woman of Sarepta," &c. (Luke iv. 25, 26.)

4. Hence we see the necessity of Divine influence in all cases.

—Christ Himself preached for three years and a-half with little sensible effect, until, by an exercise of Sovereign power, He "opened the understandings of his disciples to understand the Scriptures." (Luke xxiv. 25, 45.) St. Paul affirms the same thing of himself and his fellow-labourers: "Paul may plant, and Apollos water," &c. (1 Cor. iii. 5—7.) How much more may we exclaim, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." (2 Cor. iv. 7.) If one sinner is converted, it is because "the Lord has opened his heart." If one believer is comforted, encouraged, instructed, it is for the same reason. Whenever "the Word comes with power," it comes with the Holy Ghost, "sent down from heaven," *now*, as it did at first. (1 Thess. i. 5; 1 Pet. i. 12.) Not in conversion only, but in all subsequent experience, "it is the Spirit that quickeneth:" "the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." (2 Cor. iii. 6.)

1. *Let all examine themselves on these important points:—*

What have your advantages profited you? Sermons, Sabbaths, God's Holy Word, the table of the Lord,—what blessing have you derived? Have you "*attended?*" Has your heart been touched? Is your life renewed? How sad, how terrible your condemnation if you are still "unprofitable servants!" Oh, ask of God to pour out his life-giving Spirit on your dead souls, and to make his own ordinances effectual to your eternal salvation!

2. *Others may be conscious of some degree of blessing, but may be lamenting many deficiencies.*

"When you would do good, evil is present with you." (Rom. vii. 21.) Be humbled; confess yourselves to God; seek to have "your holy things" sprinkled with the blood of Jesus. There is but one remedy—one only source of life and animation,—the Lord the Spirit is the Author and Giver of life. Seek his gracious influences and your soul shall revive; and ordinances shall be to you as soft-flowing rivers, and you as "willows planted by their watercourses." (Isa. xlv. 4.)

LXXVIII.

LOVE OF PRE-EMINENCE.

Matthew xx. 22. "*Ye know not what ye ask.*"

A CARNAL view of Christ's kingdom came to all the disciples,—it was a national, hereditary prejudice. The notion is not even now obsolete; it forms, unconsciously, the basis of many a dream in the present day of Christ's terrestrial glory.

Compatible with a temporal kingdom was the desire of distinction and pre-eminence. So Zebedee's children and their mother came and made their suit known to Jesus. (Mark x. 35.) This poor vain woman would have her two sons sit, "one on his right hand, the other on his left," when Jesus should come in his glory. Well might He say unto them, "Ye know not what ye ask." Consider—

I. THE PRE-EMINENCE THEY DESIRED.

II. THE PRE-EMINENCE AWARDED THEM.

III. THE LESSONS TO BE GATHERED FROM THE TRANSACTION.

I. THE PRE-EMINENCE THEY DESIRED.

1. They desired positions of honour and distinction.

Jesus had on some occasions spoken to them of "thrones and crowns" (as Matt. xix. 28); and the language of ancient prophecy frequently predicted spiritual blessings under similar metaphors; and, filled with ideas of earthly grandeur, with much selfishness and little humility, these men desired the most honourable positions which could be filled in his kingdom.

2. This was but the indication of the aspirations of the natural heart.

All men, except restrained by grace, desire the same things. The lurking ambition of Paradise,—"they would be as gods,"—a spirit entailed on all Adam's posterity. What is life but a struggle for advancement, pre-eminence,—to be more rich, more noble, more

clever, more honoured than others? A disposition almost universal.

3. Nor is the Church of God exempt from it.

What but this stimulated Korah, Dathan, and Abiram? (Num. xvi. 7.) In all succeeding ages this spirit was the source of errors, heresies, schisms. "Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence, receiveth us not." (3 John 9.) No Church exempt,—Prelacy is not more proud than Puritanism. It assumes all forms—pervades all sects—obtrudes into holiest offices—defiles the most sacred things! My Church, My schools, My classes—alas for half-subdued human nature!

II. THE PRE-EMINENCE AWARDED TO THESE TWO DISCIPLES. (Ver. 22, 23), "Ye shall indeed drink of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with;"—they should be pre-eminent in suffering for their Master. JAMES, one of these brethren, was the first apostle who suffered martyrdom; and JOHN, the other, though he outlived them all, was only "their companion in tribulation" (Rev. i. 9): and the sacred story leaves him an exile "for the testimony of Jesus Christ."

—*See here the portion of God's children*,—communion with a suffering Lord and Master. "If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you." "Much tribulation;" "chastisement whereof all are partakers" (Heb. xii. 8); and "a fiery trial,"—"no strange thing." (1 Pet. iv. 12.)

—*Eminent saints often pre-eminent in suffering.* These apostles sought and found the "pre-eminence" of saints. The oftener "the gold is tried in the fire," the purer it becomes. The highest attainments in grace seem often to be connected with the deepest acquaintance with sorrow. So it was with Job, with Moses, with David, Jeremiah, Daniel, and many others. Special trials yield special mercies, and more holy, intimate acquaintance with God. "Unto you it is given, not only to believe, but also to suffer," &c. (Phil. i. 29.)

III. THE PRACTICAL LESSONS INCULCATED BY THIS INCIDENT.

1. The mortification of pride, ambition, and worldly aspirations.

No easy lesson! Even among all the apostles there was a strife "who should be the greater." If such men, in such circumstances, were accessible to such unworthy tempers, who should not watch

and pray? "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?" (John v. 44.) The spirit of "a little child," who can maintain? "The pride of life is of this world, not of God." (1 John ii. 15—17.) Oh, to "die daily,"—to mortify pride, self, vanity! "To be transformed in the spirit of our mind." (Rom. xii. 2.)

2. We should learn to be reconciled to sufferings,—“to drink of his cup.”

—*The children should not quarrel with the children's portion.* Without affliction "we are bastards, and not sons." (Heb. xii. 8.) "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." (James i. 2.)

—*Esteem special suffering a special honour and favour.* Instead of asking, "Why am I thus?" rather say, "What blessing does He design for me? What evil would He correct? What grace impart?" "I will hear the rod."

3. Dread uninterrupted prosperity.

This more dangerous to believers than any amount of suffering. The smiles of the world more to be dreaded than its frowns. Calm is deceitful—money corroding—applause flattering—riches harden the heart; and when we have many other sources of happiness, we seek it less in God!

4. Dread unsanctified affliction.

—Many hearts rebel against sorrow—impatiently desire relief. "Curse God, and die." (Job ii. 9.) Affliction not necessarily healing and ameliorating; there is "a sorrow which worketh death." (2 Cor. vii. 10.) The wicked "blaspheme, and repent not" under it. (Rev. xvi. 9—11.)

—True Christians do not always derive as much good from affliction as they might. Contented, if they "take it patiently," they fail to learn the lesson intended. Let us be more anxious to profit by affliction than to escape from it.

—All may learn many useful hints from this incident. "We know not what we ask," when we seek any temporal benefit. Let us leave all such to God:—"Thy will be done,"—"the Lord will provide,"—"our times are in his hands,"—remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, "Your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." (Matt. vi. 32.)

LXXIX.

TRINITY, OR WHITSUNDAY.

John xvi. 14, 15. "*He shall glorify me : for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine : therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.*"

THE Holy Spirit was never absent from the world or from the Church. Hovered over creation in chaos (Gen. i. 2); "strove" with the antediluvians (Gen. vi. 3); led and taught the patriarchs and prophets, "who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. i. 21); descended in his fulness on the Lord Jesus, and was "breathed" on his disciples by Him (John xx. 22). And yet, on the Day of Pentecost, and ever since, has the Holy Ghost dwelt personally in his Church so, in such manner and degree, as He never did before: according to the repeated promises of the Lord. See John xv. 26; in the chapter before us (vers. 7—13), and text; and Acts i. 4, 5. Let us consider the special promises of the text concerning this Holy Spirit; and may they be fulfilled in us!

I. HERE ARE THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD, AND OF HIS CHRIST.

II. THE SPIRIT RECEIVES OF THESE, AND SHOWS THEM UNTO US.

I. Wonderful language! "*All things that the Father hath.*"

1. Who can fathom them?

All his power, wisdom, goodness, love. "The things of God," in creation, marvel at his works; in providence, sustaining; in redemption, "the great mystery of godliness;" and after all, with revelation in our hands exclaim, "These are but parts of his ways." (Job xxvi. 14.)

2. Whatever they may be, Christ claims them.

"All things that the FATHER hath are MINE: therefore said I, he shall take of MINE, and shall show it unto you." "He shall glorify me!" Thus (xvii. 10) in his prayer to the Father, Jesus says,

"All mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them." Horrible blasphemy, if the SON is not equal with God! And again, "No man knoweth the FATHER save the SON, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." (Matt. xi. 27.) And again, "No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." (John i. 18.)

—With such wondrous words before him, who can deny the equality, yet identity of the Eternal God the Father and of his Son Jesus Christ? Their "things," their deep things, are all one!

3. That the things of God and of his Christ should be very deep, we must hence conclude.

All the promises imply this. If not, why must they be "revealed" to us? Why must the Holy Spirit "show," "discover," "manifest" them to us? "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." (Luke x. 21.)

"The world cannot see them, neither know them." (xiv. 17.) Carnal mind rejects them—carnal eye blind to them. Spread abroad in creation, man as insensible to them as the animals! Plainly in his Word, yet it is a "sealed book" to many,—to all, until their eyes are opened, and their understandings, to understand the Scriptures. (Luke xxiv. 45.)

—Even God's own people see "through a glass darkly," slow to comprehend the height and depth of his love. Prone to doubt his faithfulness and mercy,—and those who see and know the most, desire to see more! Hence the value of the promise.

II. "THE HOLY SPIRIT SHALL RECEIVE OF MINE, AND SHOW IT UNTO YOU."

1. How clearly do the Personality and Deity of the Holy Ghost here shine forth!

(a) *The work attributed to Him is all personal—individual*—that of a distinct being or existence. "He will teach you,"—"guide you into all truth." "What he shall *hear*, that shall he *speak*." (xvi. 13.) Can a mere influence "hear and speak?" Can he receive from the Son and Father, and show to us, if he be not a Person?

(b) *His office is also absolutely Divine*. Conceive of all the deepest mysteries and profound thoughts of God the Father, and God the Son—these the Spirit knows, as well as a man's mind knows what is in himself! "The Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of

God." &c. (1 Cor. ii. 7—11.) And infinite in knowledge as the mind of the Almighty, this Holy Spirit shows them to the minds of men! Almighty knowledge again! Who searcheth the heart but God only? Without a perfect knowledge of God, and of all men's hearts, the Holy Spirit could not fulfil his office—and he is therefore **GOD THE SPIRIT!**

2. The doctrine of the Trinity in unity is, from the above premises, an inevitable necessity!

—Who is this GOD, God the FATHER—the Almighty, Eternal, Omnipresent Deity? Who is this "SON," who declares his entire equality in knowledge, in everything with the Father? And who is this SPIRIT so intimately acquainted with both Father and Son, and with all hearts? Are there three Gods? No! all revelation teaches but ONE! Then these three, CALLED FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, are the THREE-ONE GOD!

3. Now with confidence learn what this Holy Spirit does for us!

"He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine—and all that the Father hath is mine—and shall show it unto you!"

—How does the Holy Spirit fulfil this office?

—*He shows us the deep things of God in his written Word:* opening our minds to see, and feel, and taste, and touch his promises.

—*He speaks as through the preached Gospel*—which comes to us "not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost," &c.

—*He reveals Christ to us in his blessed supper*—enabling us "to eat his flesh and drink his blood."

—*In secret prayer, meditation,* and hallowed communion with God.

—*But in all cases it is the actual work of the Lord the Spirit on the soul,* with or without outward means: He opens our hearts to embrace, and our minds to comprehend, spiritual things, being by his aid "spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. ii. 14, 15; 2 Cor. iii. 18.)

Oh, pray for the light, teaching, comfort of God's Holy Spirit!

—*Those who have it not*—oh, seek, ask, and He will give it you. (Luke xi. 13.)

—*Those who have a little*—seek more! more grace! more power!

—*Let the most gifted press on:* from "glory to glory." (2 Cor. iii. 17, 18.)

LXXX.

GODLY SORROW.

2 Corinthians vii. 10, 11. "*For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.*"

ANXIOUS to define and illustrate godly sorrow, "the sorrow of the world, which worketh death," cannot here be discussed. It is not only that sorrow which is occasioned by the loss of worldly things, but it may be sorrow arising from a sense of sin, but springing from worldly considerations, as the loss of character, wounded pride, or dread only of consequences,—it is shallow, unprofitable, "and worketh death," either by driving its victim to despair, or by encouraging him with false and erroneous hopes of mercy.

But spurious kinds of sorrow for sin may perhaps be discovered by our considering the true nature of the principle or affection described in the text: and may God by his grace "create and make in us new and contrite hearts!"

I. GODLY SORROW.

II. EVIDENCES OF ITS GENUINENESS.

I. This definition important and distinctive.

(a) "Godly sorrow"—so called because it is an emotion of the heart, having to do with God in all its influences.

—*This sorrow has respect to God*:—the sorrow of the world regards consequences, sufferings in this life, loss of character, and the esteem of friends, &c.—but true sorrow for sin chiefly regards God himself—I have sinned against God—"against thee only!" "How can I do this wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis xxxix. 9.)

—*It is sorrow towards God*—the soul mourns to God, laments to Him, confesses, bemoans itself.

—*This sorrow leads to God*—the opposite is denoted by Peter's language—"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." True penitence clings to Him, as the naughty child to its mother for forgiveness.

—*It is godly sorrow, because it is God's own work on the soul.* He takes away the "heart of stone," He melts, softens, lays the sinner low—pours a tender, loving, lamenting, softened grief into the heart, making sin a burden, "intolerable." In every point of view, sorrow for sin, if genuine, must be "godly sorrow."

2. "It worketh repentance unto salvation."

—Mere sorrow for sin is not a finality—it is a commencement, a preface to further work in the soul: there will be habitual regret, and occasional deep mourning for sin, as long as our life. "It works repentance"—produces a more ripened, abiding grace: a "change of mind," of will, of purpose of character. "Repentance to salvation"—a saving repentance—not a further fickle movement of the mind, but all that is enjoyed in "salvation"—a present possession—"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter i. 8, 9.) Sorrow, if godly, works repentance—repentance, salvation! And this grace is not complete until it brings us thus to Christ—to find all in Him!

II. EVIDENCES OF THE GENUINENESS OF THIS REPENTANCE: these are both definite and peculiar. "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort" (Ver. 11); a good and genuine sort of repentance, "What carefulness it wrought in you," &c.

1. "CAREFULNESS:"

—careless walking produces sin, and much sorrow: and true joy of heart for sin forgiven, will produce careful walking, watchfulness, caution.

2. "What clearing of yourselves:"

—not justifying selves, nor excusing selves, nor palliating your conduct—but efforts to get "clear" of sin—what cleansing, what searching for the evil thing—what purgation! "They would not touch the unclean thing." (2 Cor. vi. 17; Ephes. v. 11.)

3. "Yea, what indignation:"

—not against the informer or reprover, but against the sin itself. As Samuel hewed Agag to pieces: or as (Nehemiah xiii. 25) "I contended with them, and smote them," &c., or that king "who was sore displeased with himself" (Dan. vi. 14.) Indignant at sin.

4. "Yea what fear :"

—fear of falling again ; fear of those places and persons which occasioned their fall : as the horse always shies at the place where he was once hurt or frightened—as the burnt child fears the fire—so fear books, pictures, people, occupations, which have been snares to us.

5. "Yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal."

Burning zeal for God's glory, holiness, purity, ardent desire to know Him and love Him. "Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee." (Psalm xxxviii. 9.) "My soul is athirst for God," &c.

6. "Yea, what revenge !"

"Cut off the right hand, pluck out the right eye" : "hating even the garments spotted with the flesh." (Jude 23.) Sparing no darling lust, no beloved idol, no treachery—an honest revenge on all sins, corruptions, tempers, passions, and evil principles.

Let all examine the nature of their sorrow and repentance for sin. Beware of self-righteous, legal, formal, or expiatory repentance ! No tears, penances, mortifications, can atone for sin ! Christ, and Christ alone ! Mere cries for mercy cannot save.

—Oh ! sorrow from Christ, and to Christ, and for Christ, and with Christ,—tenderly, lovingly, with self-abasement—"Blessed are they that so mourn, for they shall be comforted."

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